

RINGU TULKU

Mind Training



MIND TRAINING



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by Ringu Tulku

Edited by B. M. Shaughnessy

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May all beings be happy and create
the causes of happiness.

May they all be free from suffering
and from creating the causes of suffering.

May they find that noble happiness
which can never be tainted by suffering.

May they attain universal, impartial
compassion, beyond worldly bias
towards friends and enemies.

This book is dedicated with great gratitude to all
the teachers who have trained me tirelessly.

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SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS

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WHAT ARE the reasons for following any spiritual path? Perhaps we are searching for a greater purpose and a sense of meaning in our lives. We need to find an inner and more effective way of managing our problems. We may be hoping to discover lasting happiness but the methods we have tried for dealing with our uncertainties up to now have not been very successful. Although the material world provides many comforts and practical answers, these do not always bring us the contentment we seek. Spiritual questions come from the urge for a new, more satisfying way of life and they are part of our need for a deeper truth.

There are many religions and philosophies that offer a variety of answers. It is not easy to choose

which path to follow. However, there seems to be one ideal which is cherished in every religious tradition. This is the ideal of unselfishness. A truly holy person is dedicated to others. I am not suggesting we should become saints but it is clear that kindness and generosity are creative and inspiring spiritual resources. No matter which spiritual path we take, being altruistic leads to real fulfillment.

In Tibetan, *lo* means “mind” and *jong* means “training,” and this training is regarded as the most important single teaching in Buddhism. Based on developing a deep compassion for ourselves and for other beings, it gives us a simple method of learning to be less self-centered and selfish. The paradox is that our compassion eases the distress we find around us and also heals our own unhappiness. The deeper our concern for other people’s suffering and the stronger our wish to help them, the less we suffer ourselves.

Lojong is not simply a mental exercise or a new intellectual approach, it is a profound education. It creates a radical change in our usual pattern of thinking. The meditation instructions and advice are plain and straightforward. This is a practice for ordinary life. There is no complexity or formality involved. No spe-

cial ability is needed. Anyone can train their mind. The wisdom of these slogans is not exclusive to Buddhism. It is universal and goes beyond any particular religion.

Our attitude to life matters and this training improves our attitude by changing our way of seeing things. When we are in a more positive state of mind, no unfortunate experiences can defeat us. We develop confidence and inner strength in facing the challenges of life. Rather than excluding negative and disturbing things, we do the opposite—we accept them. This turns our problems into possibilities. The satisfaction of working against suffering for everyone makes it almost certain that our lives will be more rewarding and worthwhile. Finally, Lojong has another clear goal. We are not just learning to be unselfish for the sake of it, we are also confronting the ego—the source of so much of our pain. This practice gives us an invaluable insight into the role of the ego and its demands.

The Buddha advised that we should not take the things we are taught on faith as doctrine but test what we hear; like a goldsmith who surveys the metal before him by rubbing, cutting, and melting it to discover its quality. Whether these instructions work or

not depends on our examining them for ourselves. After reflecting on the information, we put our knowledge into practice by “training” with the method—reproducing it again and again until it is a settled routine. The more we use Lojong the more useful it will be.

HAPPINESS

THE WORD "happiness" seems to have many different meanings. Opinions about it change from place to place and person to person. For some of us happiness may be wealth, for others it could be good health or success. In countries all around the world, there are people who are happy simply to be safe from violence and attack. For those of us who are fortunate to have the basic necessities of life and security perhaps happiness is having no emotional problems, but how do we solve all our problems?

Our attempts to achieve happiness in the past have generally been motivated by self-interest and self-protection. We have followed the path of desire and attachment. This path is chosen from ignorance and it has many liabilities. Our desire for happiness can never be separated from our fear and dislike of unhappiness. The compulsive search for pleasure always

includes aversion to any pain or discomfort. When we say, "I want to be happy," we are also saying, "I do not want to be unhappy." Everybody is like this. We are all running after good things while running away from unpleasant things. It is this dilemma that we are trying to overcome with Mind Training.

So much of our distress and suffering comes from the unrealistic expectations and negative reactions produced by our own mind. Our desire creates possessiveness and grasping as we fasten on to certain objects, people, or experiences for gratification. When objects satisfy us we become attached to them. The stronger our attachment, the tighter our grip and the more anxious we feel about defending our territory and possessions. Whatever we care about is idealized and must be kept safe. If our craving for something is frustrated or disappointed, we respond with aversion. When an object does not satisfy us, we angrily reject it. Deciding that it was the wrong thing all along, we set off again in pursuit of a different objective: something else, something better, something new.

Our attachment and aversion produce other negative emotions. We feel pride when our expectations are met or jealousy and envy if we do not achieve

what we hoped for. The aversion we feel when we cannot get what we want or keep what we think we need arouses fear. Fear is a basic element in unhappiness. The more aversion, the stronger our fear. We can try to avoid the things that annoy or frighten us but the aversion continues. Aversion emerges from past memories and in anticipation of the future. Even if we have no worries now, we expect trouble to appear once again and mistrust what lies ahead of us. Negative reactions remain in our mind after a disagreeable experience is over and we are always able to recall hurts from the past. There is no escape because aversion is our own creation and trying to eliminate upsetting things only makes the aversion more relentless.

The external situation alone is never the deciding factor in our unhappiness. It is our inner attitude that determines whether we will suffer. If we felt no aversion towards anything, there would be no suffering. For example, when we walk into a room and judge that it is too warm or too small or badly furnished, we have defined the room as uncomfortable and made ourselves unhappy. The room itself is unimportant. It is the mind's aversion which produces our dissatisfaction.

The root of aversion is our faulty thinking and this can be corrected. We can improve our attitude by adjusting our way of seeing things. Our joys and sorrows are not outside us and beyond our control. Happiness comes from inside us. We create it ourselves by learning to react more positively to the challenging things we encounter in life. It is our decision whether we are going to be happy or not. Being happy is a habit we can learn.

As we activate positive feelings, they grow stronger and more positive. A story which illustrates this very well tells about a Chinese lady who cried all the time, all day, every day. If it was sunny, she cried and when it rained she cried. Her friends asked her why she was always in tears and she replied, "Because I am sad!" They could not understand what she was so unhappy about until she told them, "I worry about my two daughters. One sells paper sun umbrellas and the other sells rain boots. When it is sunny, I cry because my daughter who sells boots will go out of business and I am afraid her children will starve. When it rains, I cry because my girl who sells sun umbrellas will have no customers and no money to feed her family." One of her friends said to her, "That's crazy. You

should think of your daughter who sells rain boots when it rains and remember the other daughter who sells paper umbrellas when it is fine." She had never looked at it that way before and from then on she was content.

The positive attitude and habits which we develop through this practice are very fragile at the beginning. We have to slowly open to them. It takes time, but steadily we can begin to discard the negative patterns which have stood in the way of our happiness for so long.

THE MIND

WITHOUT THE MIND, nothing can have any meaning for us. Our mind does not create and direct everything in existence, but we can only make sense of the world through the mind and the mind is all we have to work with. There is nothing else. We need to train our mind because it is the mind which makes us suffer.

From the Buddhist point of view our suffering originates from the limitations of our ordinary, unenlightened mind. Firstly, we are unaware of the basic truths of existence. Through ignorance, we have misunderstood our true nature and the nature of reality. Secondly, confused and easily agitated, we are unable to control our mind. We do not understand ourselves or our emotions.

Lojong helps us to bring our mind under control. This is needed because we are so dominated by our

illusions and mental conditioning. We know that we should not get angry or jealous or depressed. No one who feels these emotions enjoys them but we allow them to overwhelm us. We want to be positive and kind but we are in no position to feel like that if our mind is not under our own control. The ordinary mind is also very limited and insecure. Our awareness is restricted and we are inhibited from going beyond the narrow, familiar world we are used to. Anything new or out of the ordinary is treated with suspicion. These limitations are self-imposed. A different state of mind is possible.

We have created the illusion of a unique and unchanging self, an individual "I" that we believe remains fixed somewhere within us all the time as feelings and thoughts come and go. In Buddhism the term we use to describe this is "ego." Our assumed identity leads to discrimination and splits the natural oneness of our mind into two. It imposes a dualistic relationship between our ego-self and the object, dividing experience into sight and the seer, feeling and the feeler, or thought and the thinker. This is the basis for our grasping. "Wanting this" and "not wanting that," we project the attachment and aversion of the

ego onto the external world. In fact, there is no "I" beyond our basic consciousness, no "I" different from the experience. The experience is everything. We do not have any ownership over it. If we do not recognize this and subdue these projections, we will continue to suffer.

We can begin to explore the mind by engaging with it and seeing if our ideas about it can be confirmed. People have speculated about the mind for thousands of years but that does not help us in our research.

We can only become aware of the nature of our consciousness by carefully examining it. There are many theories about the mind, we refer to it and discuss it but can we actually find it anywhere? What is the mind? Where is it? Is the mind a part of our body? Is it located in the heart or in the head or somewhere else?

We take for granted that mind exists, but if it does, it must have certain qualities which can be identified. What do we know about it? What size is it? Big or small? What is its shape and color? How are we going to recognize it? No matter where we look, there is no answer to these questions because what we have called "mind" does not really exist. There is no struc-

ture or substance, no color, shape, or form to the mind.

The mind is not a separate, individual consciousness in contact with the external world. It is a momentary transient awareness, activated when an object outside us attracts one of our senses. This creates a stimulus or an association. The eye senses a form and sight consciousness follows. A sound strikes the ear and our hearing consciousness emerges. It takes all these different elements to create our experience. We mistake this continual mental interaction and activity for the mind but it is actually a stream of temporary states of mind changing from one instant to the next—a collection of endless thoughts.

Our pure, enlightened mind is limitless. It has the potential to be anything, anywhere, anytime. Nothing can hold it back. The Tibetan word for Buddha is *Sangye* and this word is very evocative. It means “awakened and blossoming.” What awakens and grows within us is not a new or different intelligence. It is not something that we have never known before. It is the realization of what we already know, our true nature. Our mind is identical to the Buddha’s enlightened mind. We are no different. He and many others

after him escaped from ignorance and suffering. Their example provides the strength, perfect training, and blessings we need for our spiritual journey.

We will only discover the true nature of the mind by watching it, honestly and deliberately. That is the aim of meditation. We find out about the mind by being mindful.

COMPASSION

ACH ONE OF US has a different personality, culture, language, or history but these are only a thin layer on the surface of our consciousness. At a deeper level, we are all alike. We all wish to be treated kindly and spared from suffering. The basis of compassion is realizing that other sentient beings want to be safe and happy just as we ourselves do. They have the same fears and sorrows. They too are suffering from unfavorable conditions and need our help. When we really understand this, the misfortune of any other being becomes troublesome to us. We feel bound to try and ease whatever pain we can: for ourselves, for the people we love, for everyone.

This aspiration to do something to assist is the essence of compassion. In Buddhism, our concern for all sentient beings is also based on the conviction that they have been our mothers in past lives. They have

made great sacrifices, nurturing and protecting us. Their previous devotion gives us a powerful sense of gratitude and a determination to protect them now in return.

The compassion we cultivate in the Lojong training has immediate, far-reaching, and positive results. It purifies more negativity than we can ever imagine. Helping all sentient beings may seem like an impossible aim at first but as compassion grows in our thoughts, it progressively influences our outward behavior and brings us and others tremendous advantages.

Acknowledging suffering in a much broader way reduces our pride and our egotism. We are not so defensive and touchy about our own welfare. This makes us less fearful and clinging. Sharing and letting go of things is easier. When our actions are motivated by kindness instead of self-interest, there is more chance of receiving positive treatment in return. Relationships are warmer. People can respect and depend on us because we are more receptive and understanding.

It is not difficult to feel sorry for someone who is in trouble but it can seem almost impossible to rejoice for them when they are happy and doing well. If we are

sincere about trying to help all beings, the success of someone else is good news. It makes our work lighter. It is one less duty for us. The advantages that other people have do not endanger our chances of success. There is always enough to go around. Feeling competitive is not necessarily harmful but it diverts us from setting our own targets and doing our utmost to reach them.

The story of a merchant who attended the Buddha's teachings gives us the right idea. Annatabindika was a very rich man but he found it almost impossible to part with his wealth. He arrived each day to hear about compassion until one day he asked to speak to the Buddha. He said that he enjoyed the talks very much but generosity was impossible for him. He felt a great pain if he gave the smallest gift. He asked how he could conquer this difficulty. The Buddha had a very practical answer. He told the merchant to exercise being generous to himself first by taking a coin in one hand and transferring it to the other hand, back and forth, over and over again. With practice, he would grow accustomed to giving. The merchant tried this, passing a coin from one hand to the other for some time until he found his problem had gradu-

ally disappeared. In the end, he became one of the most charitable of the Buddha's students, donating houses to the homeless, hospitals for the sick, and opening kitchens for destitute wanderers.

Spiritual understanding does not come from saying, "I am going to be compassionate now!" and rushing around giving people whatever they want. Compassion can only be achieved gradually, step-by-step. Being generous in very small ways, offering a bowl of food and sharing it gladly without any regrets, is a good beginning. A compassionate and unselfish attitude is the starting point for generating the compassionate energy that we need to work directly against suffering in our concrete actions and deeds. The Buddha's teachings were almost entirely about developing this selfless compassion: not just feeling nice towards others or giving things away but wishing for every single being to be free from suffering.

The Jataka Tales are a collection of stories describing many of the Buddha's previous lives and illustrating how, throughout these incarnations, he lived by the principle of compassion. One of the stories tells of his rebirth in a terrible, hot hell. With a companion he was being forced to drag an unbearably heavy cart

across a fiercely burning ground. A hell-being beat them and drove them on. They were both in torment and near death. Seeing that his companion was suffering needlessly, the Buddha appealed for him to be set free from this hopeless task. This demonstrates the purest and deepest compassion.

THE LOJONG TRADITION

MIND TRAINING comes directly from the Buddha and has been passed down to this day in an unbroken line. It was originally brought to Tibet from India in the eleventh century by the great Indian master Atisha Dipamkara (A.D. 982-1054).

Atisha was born into a noble family in Bengal and, like the Buddha, gave up all the privileges and comforts of his birth to take up a spiritual life. He studied with over a hundred teachers. During a pilgrimage while visiting the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, Bodh Gaya, he had a revelation which inspired him to travel to faraway Sumatra and find a dharma master called Serlingpa.

The Sanskrit word *dharma* is used in Buddhism to describe two kinds of spiritual information. The first takes the form of written texts and scriptures which

have been saved over thousands of years and studied from generation to generation. The second is an immediate, actual experience given as a direct transmission from teachers to their students, often without words. After making the difficult journey to find his teacher, Atisha spent twelve years with Serlingpa, receiving the transmission and practicing Lojong. He then returned to India. During his last seventeen years teaching in Tibet, the method remained very little known but it continued to be passed on selectively as an oral transmission until Langri Thangpa Dorje Sengye, a Geshe and scholar in the Kadampa tradition, provided the first written text, called "Thought Transformation in Eight Stanzas." Coming across these stanzas by chance in the daily prayers of one of his teachers, Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (A.D. 1102-1176) was struck by two lines:

*"Give all victory and gain to others,
Take all defeat and loss upon yourself."*

Astonished by this extraordinary advice, he went in search of the teacher who had written the verses. Langri Thangpa had died in the meantime but his disciple, Sharawa, explained to Chekawa that the lines

contained the essence of compassion and that no one could hope to attain enlightenment without contemplating their meaning.

As Atisha had done before him, Chekawa devoted himself to Lojong for twelve years, often in retreat. During one of his periods of retreat, he lived near a village of lepers. Leprosy was incurable and severe in Tibet and lepers were very isolated from society but one or two came to visit him. After spending time with him it was clear that simply hearing the practice was having a very surprising and beneficial effect on them. Their health was getting better and their disease was less serious. Other lepers arrived and many of them also became well.

Despite this unexpected result, Chekawa was uncertain about making the training known generally. His brother, a rather harsh and vicious character, was staying with him and had been secretly overhearing the practice with the lepers. Chekawa noticed that his brother's bad temper was improving and he was becoming more gentle and patient. This convinced him he must formally pass on Lojong and he wrote "The Seven Points of Mind Training" for the first time as a general practice text. It became popular all over Tibet

and is used in all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. I received the teachings from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, whose lineage is clearly mentioned in the lineage prayers of Lojong.

The teachings of Buddhism are so vast and complicated that it would be impossible to study them all. Lojong contains, in a condensed form, the essence of all Buddhist thought. Our prospects in other traditional meditation methods depend to some extent on our individual level of ability but Mind Training is worthwhile for everyone and enriching in every situation.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Can suffering ever be positive? A physical pain might mean that you need to take more care of yourself. Doesn't pain act as a warning?

A. Anything can be positive if we make it positive, even pain. It is our reaction to things that makes them positive or negative. If we think a situation is harsh or damaging, we are going to feel unhappy and we will suffer. If we accept the experience calmly and with pa-

tience, then it will seem less painful. The whole Lojong teaching is about managing many of the most stressful and difficult events in life with less aversion and therefore suffering less.

Q. You have said that aversion to suffering creates suffering. We strive to be happy but happiness is also an illusion. Is there any difference between the illusions of suffering and happiness?

A. When we begin any meditation training it is because we are looking for ways to deal with every illusion and concept, not just those about happiness or suffering. Lojong helps us to come to terms with every illusion, all the mistaken ideas we have about our own nature and reality. There is actually no difference between one illusion and another. They are not good or bad in themselves. Although some illusions are more pleasant than others, they all hinder us. The illusion of suffering is our own idea, we have produced it and we can do away with it.

Q. Don't human beings have to desire and want things in order to survive?

A. It may be our conditioning to believe that desire and craving are natural human reactions but our ideas could be all wrong. Some people also seem to think that anger is a source of energy or that it acts as a stimulant for survival but this is not necessarily true. From the relative perspective, survival is a concept which comes from the ego. When the ego's demands are the focus of everything, this leads to a very unhappy and tense kind of existence. The ego's attachment and aversion have never helped us to survive. I think we can do without them and still look after ourselves. Without the turmoil of the emotions, our actions are always more rational. There is a calm and logical purpose behind them and the results are better. When the negative emotions control us, everything we do is unplanned and hasty. We rush into fixing situations immediately. It is a crisis. There is no time to evaluate because the ego is desperately snatching at whatever it can find to recover. Emotions are a constant aggravation. They are like an irritating rash which we think we cannot endure without scratching. If we didn't have the rash, scratching would not be necessary.

Q. Won't we become completely passive or apolitical if we do away with duality and ignore the distinctions between right and wrong?

A. I am not suggesting that we can ignore tragic events in the world. The positive and negative qualities of life are very real. Dreadful things happen and the injustice that we see around us is wrong. We can try to prevent harm being done but we must not get totally worked up or agitated by it; that only limits our ability to help. In relation to Mind Training, we are discovering how to deal with "right" and "wrong" from an understanding of their relative and conditional nature. Concepts of good and bad are based, partly, on our personal opinions and judgments. They are relative, according to what we are familiar with. Some time ago, a group of people visited me from my district in Tibet and I asked them how their lives were. They said things were wonderful now because they could travel to the next town and visit the temple without fear. Compared to their situation during the Cultural Revolution, life was much better. For you, Tibet would seem very hard because conditions there are much worse than you are used to. It would be a struggle for you to live there happily. Everything is so different.

Q. Is there anything wrong with fighting for your principles?

A. It depends on how you fight and what the effect will be on other people. There is nothing wrong with having principles, they are a part of our culture and beliefs, but fighting for them can sometimes be unwise. It may lead to great suffering or hardship being inflicted on others. I have noticed that often, when the fighting starts, the principles disappear.

Q. People talk about the innocence of children, but I wonder if this is a myth? Children are spontaneous and open but they also seem to suffer from oppression, frustration, and anxiety. I once read in a Buddhist text that our potential for suffering is born with us. Is this true?

A. Our complex ideas come from the environment that we have experienced during childhood. I think Western psychology would agree that people can be made very unhappy and uncertain because of their conditioning. Their upbringing may give them an unrealistic view of life or leave them unprepared for difficulties. Small children are naturally more innocent than adults. We have not yet confused them with

our elaborate concepts about reality but they have the same basic worries as adults. When a child is born, its personality seems to be as solid as rock. In a small baby you can clearly see the grown-up person. There is always a greater simplicity and spontaneity in childhood, because children do not yet discriminate or make judgments about things in an intellectual way, but a child is not a blank slate. If you accept reincarnation, you must also believe that each child is a part of the continuing cycle of birth and rebirth that inevitably involves a mind caught up in attachment and aversion. Therefore the child is liable to suffer.

Q. Aversion sometimes seems unavoidable. Some situations just cannot be handled with detachment, they are simply unbearable. A persistent and unremitting noise actually becomes painful and affects the nervous system. How can we tolerate something like that?

A. We can get used to anything. There is nothing wrong with trying to reduce the noise. It might be possible to turn our hearing off but the important thing is not to concentrate on the disturbance or increase our aversion by struggling against it. That makes things even less bearable. I was once delayed

on a journey in India and had to spend the night sleeping on the floor of the railway station in Calcutta. There were hundreds of people going through that station, all night. There was nothing I could do about the crowds, the noise, or the dirt, so I adjusted to the situation, knowing it would not last long. People walked over me but I had a very nice sleep. Shantideva, one of the great masters of Buddhism during the eighth century, gives us very good advice: "If you can change the situation, there is no need to be unhappy. If you cannot change the situation, then there is no use in being unhappy."

Q. You have spoken about the aspiration to save others from suffering; if you have not yet achieved this in your heart but are trying to do so, can you call this genuine compassion or is it artificial?

A. If the actual experience of compassion has not yet come about, you can still have trust in the value of loving-kindness and gradually build up your positive feelings. It is never artificial to wish others the chance of happiness but helping them is not always a simple thing. Many factors are at work. We might succeed or we might not. There may be no progress possible right

now and benefits will only come later, at some other time. It is fortunate if everything goes well and the result is good, but we are only one aspect of the situation and it is not just because of us that things go right or wrong. A good proverb to remember is "try your best, prepare for the worst, and expect nothing."

THE SEVEN POINTS OF MIND TRAINING



THE FIRST POINT

‡...

PREPARING FOR PRACTICE

WE OFTEN FIND a heartfelt request for the help of all the Buddhas and the lineage teachers at the beginning of traditional meditation texts. Asking for these blessings gives our spiritual activity the best support. We pray for our good habits and actions to increase and for our training to be effective. Having made the decision to set off in a new direction, we draw on the enlightened energy of the Buddha to guide us. Liberating our mind and releasing all beings from suffering is the inspiration for everything we do in our practice. With this intention, sooner or later and without fail, we will be successful.

“First, train in the preliminaries.”

If our foundations are not right, whatever we build will not be right and our dharma training will not go

very deep. These preliminary points give us a secure and correct basis for beginning our work. The delusions and errors that we have fallen into are so obstinate and elusive that we hardly ever notice or stop and think to question them. This is why establishing the right attitude is so important.

We begin with Four Thoughts or Contemplations. They are not sermons or holy rules but truths which we can reflect upon and use in our own way to revise and clarify our thinking about the world. They make us aware of our true situation and give us a sense of urgency about going forward on our spiritual path. Understanding the four preliminary thoughts is the first step in refining and directing our compassion. They are the groundwork of liberation.

Precious Human Birth

This is traditionally always the first principle we think about. No matter what our hardships or handicaps, it is important to appreciate the life we have been given. Even if we have nothing, no home or wealth or education, we are human and that in itself is a very great blessing.

A human birth is not more valuable than any other

life form but it has greater possibilities and responsibilities. Human beings can destroy the world, animals and trees cannot. Our actions can be very positive or very negative. We are in a position to help thousands of other beings or to harm them, and this is why we need to understand the significance of this birth and use it mindfully.

It does not take any special talent to manage ordinary survival, even a worm can do that. Our human consciousness gives us exceptional potential. We are aware of our own thoughts. We can examine and reflect on the shortcomings of life. We have freedom of choice and can make our own decisions. We understand the difference between good and bad. Finally, our physical existence is not so harsh or precarious that it prevents us from following a spiritual path. Only human beings can fully recognize the misery of birth, old age, sickness, and death. This realization was the first step in the Buddha's liberation. We can develop the same enlightened strength and use the advantages of this birth by training our mind.

Just being alive is a great thing. It is such a pity when we break down or become self-destructive and forget all our advantages. A woman I know had an

accident climbing in Japan. She slipped and fell into a crevasse in the ice and almost died. When she was rescued, she said that all her worries had gone. She had no more complaints, she was just happy to survive. If we live like this, our cynicism and melancholy will disappear.

Impermanence

According to Buddhist thinking, something can only be “permanent” if it exists independently of everything else, is not caused by any conditions, and does not change. It is actually impossible to find anything like this. Everything that exists is interdependent, conditional, and subject to change. We can see this for ourselves. It is obvious. Nothing around us remains the same. We know things are impermanent but we do not always accept it.

Our lives are fragile. The physical and mental capacities we have taken for granted are gradually wearing down. Our body can be damaged or destroyed in a second. We will all die. That is certain, but we do not know when our death will take place. The suspense about our time of death allows us to feel eternal and gives us a false security about time. We behave as

though our lives will last forever. A sense of timelessness makes the mind passive and lethargic. It also causes insecurity and impatience in our daily lives.

Life would be unbearable if everything stayed the same because human beings find situations that are fixed and predictable very hard to tolerate. Even in small matters, we become uneasy if we feel there is no end in sight. I know of couples who live harmoniously together for ten years then marry and are divorced within a year. As soon as they feel bound to each other for the rest of their lives, they begin to fight. Impermanence removes our reasons for quarrelling with each other. Arguments only break out if we imagine that our relationships are endless. When we appreciate that our time with our families, partners, and friends may be shorter than we think, we get on better with each other. Awareness of impermanence gives us extraordinary inner strength and resilience. I have experienced this myself. When I left Tibet I travelled to India with thousands of other refugees. We had lost everything: our homeland, our property, families, and friends. People in the outside world who met us were struck by our reaction to exile. It surprised them that we all seemed so cheerful. We had arrived in a coun-

try that was completely unlike Tibet. The language, food, and weather were all totally different. It was terribly hot and the camps were crowded and noisy. The area was full of mosquitoes and leeches. Many of us had fevers and illnesses. It was a little bit like hell. People expected us to be gloomy but we were in good spirits. During the evenings, when we could not sleep because of the heat and insect bites, we laughed and joked and sang together. Although our future was uncertain, we enjoyed ourselves and I believe our Buddhist background was the reason for this. We had lost our country but life felt very precious to us. We accepted that suffering was not unusual and many other people had undergone similar ordeals before us. Among over a hundred thousand people in the camp there was death, disease, and hardship but there were remarkably few breakdowns or mental problems.

Bearing impermanence in mind pacifies our anxiety and fear. The factors causing our troubles are temporary and only here for a short time. Even in the lowest state of despair, there is the solace of knowing that things will sooner or later get better. We will also take greater pleasure in things and enjoy ourselves more if we realize that our joy will soon fade.

This thought is not about passively allowing events to control us or surrendering to circumstances. On the contrary, a sense of how transitory our lives are works against wishful thinking and lethargy. Nothing can be held back. The basis of our lives is change so there is no time to lose. We should make good use of every moment. So many complications come from holding on to the past. It is already gone, let it go. What will happen next? We do not know. By contemplating the impermanence of everything in existence, we discover a basic truth about the nature of mind.

There is a story about a wise man from Kashmir who gave two instructions to his son when he died. The first piece of advice was that his son should marry a new wife every day; the second was that he must never walk to or from his shop under the sun. The boy was obedient, he respected his father and promised to follow the directions faithfully but he could not decide how to take this advice. He searched everywhere for a woman who would marry him for one day until at last he found a beautiful girl who agreed to the conditions and they spent the night of their wedding together. The following morning, he thanked her and told her she must leave. She protested, "Don't be so

foolish." He insisted that he had to keep his promise to his father and find a new wife. She explained that he had not understood his father's words: "Your father would not be so unwise. He did not expect you to find a different wife each day! He meant for you to love your wife anew every day, as if you had only just married her." After considering this carefully he saw that she was right, so he asked her what his father meant by telling him never to go to or from his shop in daylight. She said, "It's very clear: you should go to your shop before sunrise and come back after sunset. Do not waste any time, use every minute. He meant for you to be hardworking." He followed his father's advice and had a very nice life.

The Deficits of Samsara

Samsara is not a place or a situation but a painful state of mind, dominated by confusion and ignorance. This ignorance is subtle, it is not so much a lack of information as a lack of clarity. We do not know who we are or what we are doing. We wander in samsara and return again and again to the cyclic existence of samsara.

Our true nature is absolutely pure and luminous. We lose sight of this purity when conflicting concepts

from our senses and the ego cloud our minds. Our awareness is dulled by the repeating cycles of pleasure followed by pain, expectation followed by dismay, and desire followed by loss. The illusions and conflicts of samsara do not really exist. They are myths, constructed by the mind.

The mind creates samsara because it is the mind which interprets what the body experiences in an incomplete and deceptive way. Our eyes are engineered to picture something visually. We respond to the object with our sense of sight but when we close our eyes, we can only see what we mentally recall, not the original vision. We are never able to reproduce exactly what our senses received because the mind records the information in our imagination, under the influence of former associations and memories. These subjective mental patterns shape our whole perception of reality.

Each of us has a characteristic blueprint for the external world and the impressions which do not fit into this model are simply ignored or overlooked. When we are introduced to new ideas, we try to adapt them or cut them down to size, but if they still do not match our mental expectations, they will be discarded. I en-

countered this in a very vivid way when I arrived in India after leaving Tibet. I was told about something called a "train." I had never heard of one before, there was no such thing in Tibet. We had no trains there. People told me the train was made of metal and travelled down two iron tracks. You could ride in it drinking a cup of tea and the tea never spilled. I tried to imagine this. I pictured a ball rolling down an iron road and myself turning around and around inside it but I could not imagine drinking a cup of tea without spilling it because the image my mind produced gave me only a very partial understanding of the train. With practice, we can confront the delusions of cyclic existence and free ourselves from them. Being human means we are likely to be unhappy but it is possible to look for a way out; to renounce the suffering of samsara, to transcend it.

Karma: Action, Cause and Effect

Just as each seed has a flower, every action has a consequence. This is the law of karma. Our karma is everything we are from our past lives; through this lifetime from birth until now, today, and yesterday. Our karma can be plus or minus. We do negative

things when emotions like anger, pride, jealousy, and greed take over and this leads to negative results.

Memories of the virtuous things we may have done before or our plans to do better in the future are not going to make any difference now. The impact of our immediate thoughts is what truly matters. This moment is the outcome of our previous actions and if our situation is unfavorable, it is the effect of our past negativity. The future is created by what we do now. This makes liberation possible.

By recognizing and regretting negative conduct, our karma can be changed. The best way of improving our actions and their outcome is to purify the way we think. When our mental attitude is more wholesome, our physical and verbal behavior will be better. It is always possible to turn bad mental habits into good habits but we have to be skillful to remedy our karma. We cannot push too hard. The mind is very sensitive and subtle and too much pressure will not work.

People sometimes have the impression that Buddhist philosophy is dull and serious but it is actually an extremely optimistic way of life. If we follow the preliminary thoughts, we are in no doubt that our human existence is valuable. We know that nothing

in the world is permanent or lasting and we recognize suffering as an inevitable result of our own negative actions. These are all insights which lead to peace of mind.

THE SECOND POINT

PRACTICING WISDOM AND COMPASSION

IN THE Sanskrit language, *bodhi* is the word for “enlightened” and *citta* means “the heart” or “mind,” and although it has many levels and dimensions, *bodhicitta* is essentially the experience of limitless compassion and wisdom that we are trying to cultivate through training the mind.

Lojong has two main objectives. The first aim is to generate the relative bodhicitta or compassion which releases us from our cocoon of self-importance. Putting our welfare to one side, we dedicate all our good qualities, talents, and energy to removing the sorrow and pain of all sentient beings. The second aim is to realize the clarity, awareness, and wisdom of ultimate bodhicitta.

It is said that, like the two wings of a bird, wisdom and compassion are both needed in order to fly and

these are at the center of the Lojong practice. Although we make a distinction between them and consider them individually in the text, they are interconnected and one includes the other. As compassion grows with training, we gain more insight into our nature. The clearer our understanding of reality and our true nature, the more compassionate we become.

Relative bodhicitta is based on loving-kindness and the empathy that we already possess and draw on in our relations with other people. It does not demand a radical change in our thinking. Ultimate bodhicitta is less accessible and much more exacting because it involves a deep shift in perspective. It is a realization. If this understanding is complete, we are enlightened. The mind regains the purity of its pure nature and our viewpoint is transformed, we see things “as they are” without confusion or discrimination.

Experiencing ultimate wisdom is not being transported to some unimaginable, mysterious realm or a higher plane of existence. It is simply being without delusion. Nothing in our material surroundings has changed, nothing is different—except our mind.

Ultimate Bodhicitta

The second point of Lojong describes the wisdom of ultimate bodhicitta first in order to give us a sense of how things are in reality and a greater clarity of mind. These slogans prepare us for the later work of relative compassion and the exchange of oneself for others, tonglen, which is the main practice of Mind Training.

“Regard all phenomena as a dream.”

We have all had dreams that feel almost real. In the dream state we are surrounded by things which appear solid, vivid, and alive but as soon as we awaken, they disappear and no trace is left. They only existed in our mind. The whole exercise implied by this slogan is to realize that the objects we encounter and our reactions to them are as transitory and unreal as dreams. Everything we perceive with our mind is dreamlike. The world is “there,” we sense and touch it but it is also “not-there.”

Our reality is constructed by the mind. I look at a tree. Is my eye seeing a tree? No, it is observing leaves, branches, and a trunk and the mind calls these a tree. Tree is a word, a concept. We claim a certain national-

ity or name but these distinctions are made up by our mind from the bits and pieces of information that we have been given by others. Physically, what we enjoy or dislike is determined by the mind. If something smells nice, the mind likes it and the nose does not matter. Desire and suffering feel intense and powerful when we experience them but it is our grasping which makes them seem real, and the moment we recognize that they too are dreams, we are free of them.

We try to make our world solid and coherent by giving names and qualities to things but when we look closely, we discover that the structure of all phenomena is a combination of complex and relative elements. Objects appear, disappear, and reappear but they have no essential or substantial nature. If we analyze each element, we inevitably reach a point where we can find no unconditional basis for the objects' existence. It is impossible to detect any solid essence or identity. Everything can be divided into smaller and smaller units until the object itself disappears.

For something to exist, all of its parts must be present and working together. If anything is missing, the conditions for the object to manifest are gone and it ceases to be. For example, we see a rainbow when all

the elements are brought together: the sun, water, and an observer. All these elements of the rainbow are interrelated and interdependent. If the sun goes away or the moisture dries up, the rainbow is no longer there. It never existed on its own as a real object apart from the words for the factors which made it visible in the sky. This is a metaphor for anything we experience with our senses. Essentially there is nothing enduring or real in our material surroundings, our relationships, or our mind. They are all empty.

The idea of “emptiness” is so striking that it shatters our habitual way of thinking and cuts straight through our attachment and aversion. If things are basically empty, what is there to be possessive or anxious about? There is nothing to choose or cling to and nothing to fear or hate.

“Examine the unborn nature of mind.”

The understanding of the dreamlike and provisional nature of external reality helps us when we turn to investigate the inner nature of the mind. What is the mind? How is it formed and what are its basic qualities? Can we directly experience the mind? Is it an object or not? We cannot see it but we can feel its

awareness and its consciousness. What is consciousness? Consciousness comes from the senses. It is stimulated by touch, taste, sight, and so on but how does our consciousness work? Can we see without our eyes or hear without our ears? We know we can in dreams and imagination. These are the puzzles we are trying to understand.

We have the idea that our mind remains unchanging from birth through childhood to old age. This is not so. The word "unborn" in this slogan counters our tendency to think of the mind in this tangible and permanent way. The true nature of the mind is beyond the conditions of birth or death. It comes from nowhere and it goes nowhere. We cannot find the beginning or the end of mind. There is no mind apart from our awareness of the stream of thoughts flowing through our consciousness. The enormous volume and speed of these thoughts gives the impression of a fixed, continuous, and independent mind. The mind is transient and without categories or qualities. We encounter it, briefly and spontaneously, but only in the present. It arises in a moment for just that moment, then it is gone and only memory remains. It is possible to notice something about the nature of mind in

the moment but we never see the whole picture. Like being a tourist in a strange city for the first time, our visit is short and we cannot really get to know it well.

In the meditative state when our mind is quite still, its unborn, pure, and enlightened quality is briefly perceptible. This is a fleeting and inexpressible experience. We have to leave it at that. We rest in the here and now, in the timeless moment between past and future.

*“Self-liberate even the antidote and free
yourself from the findings of the meditation.”*

Here we are cautioned against growing attached to our meditative experiences. During practice, we might catch a glimpse of the mind's emptiness but it is important to keep our balance. One glimpse does not mean that we have attained an absolute or ultimate realization. At this stage our meditation is still only relative and conditional. We have to go further and ask ourselves, “Who is meditating and searching for the mind? What is it that has been found?” If we are not able to identify any independent or separate seeker or truth beyond the impermanent and insubstantial mind, then the findings of our meditation are also illusion.

We should draw no conclusions from our meditation because both the meditator and the meditation are intrinsically empty. There is no substance or insight in emptiness. So how can we search or find anything there? If we understand the experience in this way, there is no longer any need to look for a solution and we remain in a state of no more searching.

“Rest in the nature of alaya.”

Our ordinary consciousness flows from seven senses: these are the five sense organs, the mind, and our sense of self. Beneath this consciousness is *alaya*, the universal ground of mind. It is the pure and simple state of being and the most subtle level of human awareness. When awakened, it is said to be our Clear Light or Buddha-Nature expressed very directly, free of turbulence or distortion.

Alaya is the immediate present. We are not used to staying in the present but there is nowhere else to be. The past has gone and the future is not yet here. It is that simple: only now exists. The present cannot be controlled. If we hold this moment back, it becomes the past. If we try to make the moment last, we are sending it into the future. In Zen Buddhism, there is a

saying: "When you eat, you eat. When you sleep, you sleep." Being in the moment gives us some spaciousness and freedom. The meditation exercise of ultimate bodhicitta is devoted entirely to staying in the present because we so often live in the past or future.

The clarity of alaya is often obscured or concealed. If the mind is clamoring or agitated, we are completely unaware of this level of consciousness. It goes unnoticed in our ordinary thought processes while we are awake but when we are deeply asleep, and our senses are suspended, our perceptions dissolve into alaya for a brief time. While still sleeping, we leave this state as our sensory consciousness reappears in a dream form and submerges the alaya aspect once again.

All meditation methods have the same purpose: to keep us in the present and to introduce us to the mind. We are not trying to stop our thoughts but to feel less trapped by them. The earlier we can catch ourselves from falling in with habitual patterns and getting entangled the better, and one of the most dependable techniques for preventing this is awareness of the breath.

Usually we breathe without taking any notice but in

this technique we watch the breath, following it as it flows in and out of the body. We keep calm. We are not trying to accomplish anything. We just allow the mind to use the breath to settle. We do not have to supervise our senses or our thoughts. If something distracts or interrupts us, we let it pass. Staying mildly aware of our breath, we observe it without getting too absorbed by it.

Meditation is like taking a holiday. We have permission to give up planning and worrying. We are off duty. It is time to relax and slow down. Too much effort with our practice makes us tight and that is no use, but allowing the mind to go completely flat is not the answer either. If we are not alert, we will fall asleep or our attention will wander without us knowing it. We are trying to find a balance, neither too tense nor too sluggish. The Buddha gave precise instructions concerning the “seven-point posture” for meditation. Adopting this posture helps to straighten and stabilize the body in support of the mind. The physical position for meditation is important but sitting cross-legged is not absolutely necessary. We can just sit comfortably.

The body is our environment. It reflects our state of

mind. We know from reading other people's thoughts in their faces how much is expressed in our mouth and eyes. The mouth is especially revealing: gritting our teeth or being tight-lipped means we are trying too hard or holding something back. The mind becomes open and quiet by releasing tension in the face and neck. When we are not wound up or straying between the past and the future, the meditation gradually brings us into the present moment—grounded in our body.

It is a good idea to start a meditation period by breathing twenty-one times. Breathe in, hold the breath for a short while, and breathe out. This helps to quiet the mind and bring it back to the body. We place our hands on our lap, thumbs touching to balance the shoulders and prevent ourselves from leaning to one side or another. This is important because if the body bends and the spine is not straight, certain negative emotions are intensified.

The chest is expanded for deep breathing. We tilt the neck slightly forward with the chin tucked down. The teeth and jaw are held loosely and the mouth is relaxed with the tongue touching the upper palate. The eyes are focused at a distance. In the Tibetan tradition, we keep the eyes slightly open, looking down

at first but, after a while, it may help to close the eyes briefly or to gaze into the distance so that we do not become too withdrawn. This physical arrangement gives our meditation practice a secure support. There is a suppleness and a feeling of peace. It is effortless. We imagine ourselves like a bundle of hay, cut loose. These lines describe a simple approach to meditation:

Rest without going into the past.
Do not follow past thoughts
or gather up thoughts of the future.
Stay in the present.
Let your senses be open
and let the thoughts flow by.
Remain in alaya.

Our everyday mind is often extreme. Either we are excited and overflowing with ideas or we feel bored and tired. If we rest in the alaya state during meditation, our thoughts and feelings are less turbulent and the mind stays collected but alert.

The Postmeditative Stage of Ultimate Bodhicitta

Buddhist meditation has two phases: the activity itself when we are doing our practice and the period

following, when we apply our meditation experience to ordinary life. All the slogans up to this point have given us advice and guidance for the actual process of meditation but the postmeditative stage is about putting the effects of the training into action in the outside world.

"In postmeditation, view everything as illusion."

The awareness of alaya influences our everyday lives. Knowing everything to be impermanent and insubstantial, we are not so deluded by the objects that attract us. We do not fix on to things so passionately. We can afford to relax and be more tranquil about our situation. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, one of the great teachers who brought Tibetan Buddhism to the West after 1959, describes this viewpoint as, "be like a child of illusion." Treating everything as an illusion allows us to be playful and spontaneous. Through this slogan we rediscover the simplicity that children still have.

Relative Bodhicitta

The instructions that we have received about the ultimate level come to our aid as we proceed to the relative practice of bodhicitta. They ensure that we do not

falter or lose momentum and find excuses for giving up. They also encourage us in the contest with our most intimidating opponent, the ego.

Attachment and aversion are often alternate aspects of the same emotional sequence. We feel aversion when our desire is frustrated. Anticipating loss or defeat, we attach ourselves to something comforting for protection. Our aversion creates the compensating attachment. Tonglen provides us with a unique method to break this cycle.

Tonglen Meditation

This is the heart of Mind Training. The Tibetan word *tonglen* means “giving and taking,” and this simple and short exchange is essential for releasing us from suffering and generating compassion.

Both our fear and our desire are directly provoked by the tonglen meditation and it is an especially direct and effective way of dealing with aversion. We deliberately face all the things we dislike and dread. This takes courage. We imagine taking in and eliminating the hardship and pain that we have previously fought against and tried to run away from. The pleasures of wealth, power, and health that we wished for

ourselves we now send to others. This totally counteracts our normal behavior and puts us on a collision course with the ego. Accepting and enduring negative things and daring to let them happen to us dispel both their harmful effects and our own anger and hatred. It makes adversity less frightening. We do not cause suffering or seek it out. We take up whatever suffering is around us, transforming it in the "giving and taking" exercise so that no one else will be injured by it and the negativity which already exists in the world is reduced. Thinking of our family and friends, the people we love—both alive and dead—our acquaintances, strangers, and even our enemies, we resolve to work on conquering all their misery and bad karma.

It would not be possible to give out such positive energy unless we felt positive ourselves and the more we exchange good things for bad, the better we feel. We are the source of healing and happiness. Our generosity and concern pacify every negative situation. As we send out kindness, we grow accustomed to being strong and kind. In this way, our positive feelings are constantly renewed and can never be exhausted.

Perhaps you know the story about the man who

arrived in heaven and when asked by God where he wanted to go replied that he wanted to see both heaven and hell. First, he went to hell. There was a large table with all the inhabitants of hell sitting around it. The center of the table was full of delicious food. Each person had two very long chopsticks. They could reach the food but they could not get it into their mouths because their chopsticks were too long. They were miserable. No one was eating and everyone went hungry. Next he was taken to visit heaven. All the inhabitants of heaven were also sitting around a big table full of delicious food but they were happy. They too had very long chopsticks but they were eating and enjoying themselves. They used the chopsticks to feed each other across the table. The people in heaven had discovered that it was in their interest to collaborate unselfishly.

Tonglen subdues our fear. What frightens us most is the thought of being afraid. That is the greatest fear. Nothing puts us in more danger than our own mind and when what we are frightened of actually happens, it is never as bad as we imagined. There is no protection against fear. Even when we think that we have found some safety, we still wonder if our de-

fenses are reliable and this uncertainty destroys our security. We create fear and we can uncreate it. It is a habit that can be broken. A good remedy against fear is to actively provoke it. Instead of feeling helpless we confront our worst fear. If you are frightened of losing something, give it away. If heights scare you, climb to a high place. If you are terrified of speaking in public, stand before an audience. This is the simplest way of mastering fear.

“Train in taking and sending.

These two should ride the breath.”

The exchange we make between ourselves and others is based on the breath. As we exhale we send out all our good fortune and well-being into the world around us. Breathing in again we absorb all the suffering of others, taking every sad and uncomfortable aspect of life upon ourselves.

All the negativity in the world is visualized either as a cloud of dust or black smoke, almost as a form of pollution. This enters our body through the nose and settles in our heart. It purifies and eats away all our own fear, aversion, and ignorance instantly. Like the sun coming out, our alaya nature arises as bright,

radiant light. Healing and purifying us from within, it totally erases every trace of negativity. Breathing out, positive energy, joy, wisdom, and purity stream from our heart as light towards all beings. It touches them and they are well, happy, and free.

Our first attempts to practice tonglen may go better if we hold in our mind someone who has been very loving towards us. They feel so dear to us that we willingly take on their negativity and pain. Drawing their sorrows in and sending back to them our peaceful and protective qualities, we remove all their suffering. During the meditation it is important to breathe normally and it is not necessary to make the exchange with each and every breath.

Negativity is an illusion and a symptom of our mistaken view of things, so taking on negativity cannot possibly harm us or put us at any risk. We are the cause of healing. Our focus is not on suffering but on creating complete freedom from suffering. Tonglen does not threaten anything except our ego. The anxiety that we may be injured by the exchange only develops because our aversion is intensified by the meditation. Remember that the greatest source of suffering is our aversion to suffering and when we take

on this aversion fearlessly, meeting it in an inclusive way, it becomes a friend and an ally.

The Postmeditative Stage of Relative Bodhicitta

“Three objects, three poisons, three roots.”

Our typical reaction to our material surroundings takes three forms: attachment, aversion, and indifference. These habitual responses produce desire, hatred, and ignorance, which are called the three mind poisons. We admire and desire certain objects, others we dislike, and the rest we ignore. In our relationships, we cling to friends and loved ones, we hate and feel anger against our enemies, and disregard everyone else as of little interest.

There was a very famous and scholarly lama in Tibet called Patrul Rinpoche. He lived as a nomad and had no possessions or attachments. Many people gathered to hear him teach when he was in their area. One day another lama came to visit him and Patrul inquired about the meditation practices this lama had been doing. The visitor replied, “I have been meditating on passion and now I never, ever feel either hatred or anger.” Patrul decided to put this to the

test so he turned to his attendant and whispered, "This person has given up his anger but his hands are not clean." Such a comment in those times implied that the man was a thief and word got around the crowd that people should hide their belongings from him. Eventually, the lama overheard what was being said and became furious at the false accusation. He was determined to discover who was spreading this lie about him. When he found out that Patrul had started the gossip he marched into his tent to complain. He banged the table, shouting furiously and protesting at being slandered. Patrul laughed and replied, "I thought you said you never felt anger anymore?"

Anger is the most negative and irrational of the three poisons. Its effects are costly and always destructive. It is worse than a million attachments. It can be difficult to control because it is like fire, flaring up suddenly then dying down, but this also makes it easier to work with than desire or attachment. The first sensation of anger is often natural and spontaneous and if we let it go, it will quickly burn out. The anger that we cling to after the reason for it is over stays with us and turns into a consuming hatred which is bad for

everyone. Both anger and compassion can originate from the same impulse, a basic sense of injustice. When we feel a situation is unfair and should not be happening, we have a choice. We can either focus our anger on the person who is doing wrong or we can use our compassion to understand the problem and do something about it.

Attachment or desire is the most difficult emotion for human beings to control because it is the basic characteristic of human nature. Desire is very complex. It causes trouble because it gives rise to so many other negative emotions. It is often at the root of our aversion, fear, and anxiety, but it is not impossible to give up. Although many obstacles are produced by desire and attachment, not all of them are unfavorable. Desire can sometimes motivate us to do good. For instance, a *bodhisattva* is someone who has vowed to reach the enlightened state of mind for themselves and for all sentient beings. They feel a strong attachment to saving others from suffering and wanting freedom and happiness for everyone. This noble intention is a positive desire.

Ignorance is less destructive than hatred or desire but it is unyielding and extremely difficult to give up.

By definition, we are unaware of it. We do not realize how ignorant we are. We can only make very slow progress working on ignorance because it is so much in the background. It is a lack of clarity and understanding which is not very obvious, dramatic, or overwhelming.

The antidotes against the mind poisons are the three roots: loving-kindness, equanimity, and compassion. When anger or desire occupies our thoughts, we use our compassion to dissolve these painful emotions for the sake of all beings. Avoiding one-sidedness and partiality, we maintain our equanimity so that neither good or bad excites us. We dedicate our loving and happy feelings to others. Our offering seems small in terms of the immense suffering all around us but each act of generosity has a significant and cumulative effect.

*“Cultivate a compassionate attitude
by enlisting the slogans.”*

Our understanding grows deeper by using the slogans as reminders. They are like a mantra we say out loud to underline our positive intentions. Repeating them helps the training seep through our conditioned

habits and defenses. In all of our activities we call to mind our compassion and the “giving and taking” meditation, accepting the bad and wishing only good to others. This affirms our undertaking to take on suffering and makes it completely sincere and genuine. Approaching everything as an opportunity to train the mind gives our lives a real purpose and direction.

“Begin the sequence with yourself.”

People have different capabilities and this advice is about working with our limitations and making progress from where we actually are. If we feel apprehensive or reluctant to take on suffering, even in our imagination, it may be best to do tonglen with ourself first because of this insecurity. Thinking of all the harsh or unhelpful influences of our past and the adversity which may await us in the future, we substitute our mercy and goodwill. We can also give and take between the negative and positive tendencies of our personality, replacing our disagreeable characteristics or faults with virtue, forgiveness, and patience. A more traditional Buddhist approach is to imagine our spiritual teacher at our heart center and give all our negativity to him while he radiates wisdom and

compassion back to us. This is less personal so it might be easier.

We absorb and purify the negativity without becoming too intent on it. As we bring it in on the breath, we are comfortable and happy. It feels positive because we are undoing so much suffering. There is no pain left anywhere in the world as our healing joy is sent back. This is what we are trying to accomplish.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. How can we train ourselves not to make things solid and permanent when we have been taught to see them that way? It is one of our strongest habits. I can intellectually consider the idea of the mind and objects being relative and empty but it doesn't change my basic attitude deep inside.

A. Emptiness is an experience. It is like suddenly realizing that we are dreaming while we are asleep. We become conscious of our dreaming state. If we have this awareness even for a moment, our relationship with the world is altered. There isn't anything to fear or mistrust because we understand that no real risk or

danger exists. The emotions still ebb and flow but we do not need to resist them because we have seen their emptiness. We deal quite differently with our lives when we accept sensations and impressions “as if” they are dreams. Nothing disturbs us in the same way. Our suffering is not so intimidating or intrusive because we know it will not last. Viewing the emotions as empty reduces their power to bother us. We are less sensitive to them and they take up less of our attention. We take life more easily.

Q. I cannot imagine the process of purifying my own negativity by taking in negativity. I have always thought that a negative factor can only be counteracted with something positive. Doesn’t purification mean intensely experiencing all the bad things inside us, removing them from our thoughts, and replacing them with good things?

A. Negative elements can cancel each other out. In homeopathy, poison is used as a medicine against disease and it is similar in the tonglen process. The negativity we accept does not make us feel bad or impure. It dissolves our own negativity. We use the experience of suffering to promote our spiritual work.

When our results are imperfect it is not a sign that the training is going wrong or a reason to stop practicing. If you get a headache, it could be a part of the meditation experience or because you watched too much television the night before. In any case, the headache can stand in place of all the pain of other sentient beings throughout time. We exploit wounding things by making them our practice and they become positive because of our positive attitude. We do not need to pass through negative states of mind in order to purify them. Most meditation texts point out that the less suffering we undergo, the better. I was once told about a man staying at a Buddhist center who fell down the stairs injuring himself badly. The other residents did not go to help him because they believed that interfering would prevent him from discharging his negative karma. If we imagine that negativity is worked out like this, we have completely misunderstood karma. No one can take on another person's karmic debts but we should always try to offer comfort if we can. It is never suggested in Buddhist teachings that we must bring out all our painful thoughts and be forced to wrestle with them. Suffering does not erase or reduce our negative karma. It creates more frustra-

tion and negativity. Purification is not a punishment, it is a gradual decrease in negativity and an improvement in our state of mind.

Q. As you practice meditation, you begin to look at the world with different eyes and become even more conscious of suffering. If things begin to seem more dreadful than before, how can we be positive?

A. Mind Training helps us to see the way things truly are and so we naturally become more aware that there is a great deal of suffering in the world. This gives us a sense of compassion for suffering generally and can make our own suffering less intense and serious. If you have a problem and think that you are the only person with this terrible problem, you feel alone and distraught. When you realize that there are many other people with worse hardships than yours, you feel lighter in spirit. Another way to stay positive is to try to do whatever you can to spare other sentient beings from unhappiness. The relief you bring will give you such satisfaction and, in spite of the wretchedness you find in the world, you will feel better. We can be idealistic and passionate about helping the starving or the poor in other countries but we have to put our

own lives in order first. If we can be saner, nicer, and a bit happier ourselves, that is valuable because it relieves the people around us. In our humble way, we might accomplish a great deal. Seeing the troubles of the world openly and honestly means we have fewer illusions and a more realistic response.

Q. Do preferences and distinctions about good and bad come from the absolute or the relative aspect of mind?

A. Everything brought to our consciousness by the senses is always relative because our ordinary mental perceptions invariably involve discrimination and selection. The attachment or aversion we feel is an expression of the duality of our relative mind, confused by incorrect understanding. With the Lojong practice we are setting free the true, ultimate nature of mind—totally beyond our conditioning. This aspect of mind has no duality, no partiality, and makes no distinction between good and bad.

Q. Are there any specific instructions about how we should breathe when doing tonglen? Where should I

focus? On the nose? Can my attention be wherever I want?

A. It is up to you. Your mind is not outside or inside so you do not need to focus anywhere. Just be aware of your breathing. It does not really matter how you breathe, the idea is to let the mind be without worrying about it. Breathe naturally, the way you usually breathe. The technique is not really important here. The breath is just a way of relating to yourself. Breathing itself is a natural tonglen. Breathe in and think for a few moments of the pain and sorrow you are taking for others. For a short time your breath is still and you imagine all the negativity being purified within you. Then release the breath, sending positive, pure light into the world. Concentrating on the breath and being aware of the breath are totally different things. The moment you study the breath you are bringing something back to memorize or analyze. Being aware of your breathing is just being present and letting your consciousness flow without attachment.

Q. Can we ever hope to completely prevent or get rid of fear?

A. We can learn how to face our fear but doing that does not get rid of all fear. The only way to remove fear completely is by realizing our true, ultimate nature. We know life is not “a bed of roses.” Everyone has burdens and anxieties but most of our problems have solutions and we can work them out. The understanding that problems will always reappear helps us with our fear. Worrying is no use. If we are frightened about getting ill or old, we will still get old and ill. So why worry? Better to make the best of things. To find the root of fear we need to look deeper. Fear is not caused so often by the negative emotions of anger or hatred but by desire, which leads to greed and aggression when we are afraid of losing something.

Q. Is it correct to say that when you calm the mind eventually you will experience clarity?

A. Meditation has both elements. Our ordinary consciousness is like water which has been churned up and is full of mud. This confusion and dullness of mind will only clear if we are calm for a period of time. As we meditate, the debris settles and our thoughts are not so chaotic. The mind does not stop

but it slows down and begins to find its natural level. When there is less agitation, we experience reality and the nature of mind itself with greater clarity. Of course, it is easier to talk about calmness or clarity than to actually attain it but this is so important for our happiness. Learning to control the mind in a skillful way, not allowing it to have too much influence or too much freedom, takes some know-how. We need to practice because the mind is so evasive and obstinate. Too much pressure and it will rebel. Too little and it tries to take over. As we continue to meditate we may become more conscious of distractions. This can be discouraging. The mind seems so restless that we begin to doubt that we will ever be able to meditate properly. Frustration is a sign that we are on our way to a deeper insight. We have slowed down enough to notice how fast our thoughts are moving. Many people give up meditation when this happens but it is an important turning point. For the first time we are experiencing how lively the mind is. This is not losing control but being more aware. Calming the mind is a means not an end. Clarity is the goal of meditation, not just calmness.

Q. In Western psychology, masochism is a neurosis in which people feel that their pain is somehow deserved. Is this training unsuitable for someone with that condition? Also, do these teachings work on our deep psychology or on a completely different layer of consciousness?

A. This meditation method is about taking on the suffering of every sentient being and dissolving it. It is completely unlike masochism in the sense that we are eliminating pain. We generate positive healing and loving energy and gladly exchange this for the suffering of other beings. The process actually decreases pain by undoing its root cause. In the West, you analyze emotional difficulties one by one and try to cure them but that is not always successful. As you work out one, another takes its place. This training cuts through to the origin of suffering. It does not tackle each symptom individually but confronts the culprit for all our sufferings, the aversion of the ego. There are no restrictions on who can undertake this practice.

Q. My biggest problem seems to be trusting that once I let go of the things I desire, I will still get what I need. Am I going to feel deprived if I let go?

A. This is a very subtle point. Often the harder we try to let go, the tighter our grip. When we really let go, we can stand back and move away and there is space to concentrate on something else. The Lojong practice and text make no mention of austerity or self-denial. It is fine to take pleasure in the things we have. Sacrificing what we want or doing without does not work and is not necessary. There is no need to give up things but we should not get too attached to keeping them or disappointed when they are gone. Tilopa, the Indian saint, told his disciple Naropa that it was not the objects in themselves which imprison us and make us suffer but our attachment to them. The emotions associated with attachment prevent us from enjoying anything. If we are no longer craving, we have contentment. This is the way to understand it.

Q. Can we remove our unawareness of alaya by doing this practice?

A. The dullness of our perception of alaya is simply our own inability to see clearly. We have no clarity because of our self-centeredness and self-delusions. Mind Training emphasizes the welfare of others and when we are occupied with that, we are less wrapped

up in ourselves. Our own projections and needs do not overpower our thoughts so completely. Although we have not yet reached the clarity of our true nature, it is possible to move from this level towards alaya. Alaya is like a cloudy sky. Enlightenment is there, like the sun behind the clouds.

THE THIRD POINT

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TRANSFORMING ADVERSITY

OUR HISTORY is not very pleasant. It is full of negative actions and negative results. For as long as beings have existed, hatred, aggression, tragedy, disaster, and disease have existed. We cannot escape adversity but we can remove suffering for ourselves or anyone else by making it our practice.

“Turn all mishaps into the path to enlightenment.”

If we try to ward off troubles, we lose the potential to make the best of our training. Our aversion grows stronger as we are caught up in negative reactions. Instead, we can make use of misfortune. For example, if your mother dies, you may become distraught because you loved her and she loved you. Perhaps you think it is unfair that she has passed away and feel resentful. Or you blame yourself for the things you did

not do for her while she was alive. There is no point in being bitter or regretful. It is better to try and bear your grief with compassion. From the Buddhist viewpoint and in the context of Mind Training, we pray for our mother's liberation from suffering. Remembering that all sentient beings are close to their mother and feel anguish if parted from her, we put our loss of a loved one in the place of all their losses. This gives a sad experience a positive end.

We know that the reason we suffer is aversion, which leads to fear. With this slogan, we turn our dislike of adversity into something worthwhile. Instead of treating difficulties as oppressive and unwelcome, we take them on. This unsettles the ego and forces us to be more adaptable. Mishaps move us ahead on our route towards liberation. The Lojong text suggests three kinds of skillful means which will also help us: through relative and ultimate bodhicitta and the special practices.

Relative Bodhicitta

We cannot control or manipulate external circumstances but we can choose how we respond to them. Anxiety and suffering are produced within us by the

mind and the first way to transform them is through relative bodhicitta. These slogans help us work through our own positive and negative identification with events.

"Drive all blame into one."

We often blame other people or situations outside us for our unhappiness. Suffering is the result of our own ignorance, attachment, and aversion. Recognizing this allows us to find a remedy. We may look for explanations elsewhere but our pain is primarily caused by the self-cherishing ego.

Blaming the ego for our troubles should never make us feel guilty. I have noticed that people in the West associate blame with guilt and feel badly about things which are not really their fault. Guilt is not usually caused by selfishness but by the sense of self-importance that we build up when the ego is at the core of our existence. Making ourselves central to events means that the world revolves around us and we feel at fault if anything goes wrong.

Taking on the suffering of all beings is a very helpful antidote to guilt. It turns our attention away from the ego and removes many of our regrets. Although

we are not responsible for everything, our conduct has karmic consequences and putting the blame in the right place helps us to admit our negative actions and purify them for everyone.

“Be grateful to everyone.”

This is a very profound statement. One of our primary tasks in this training is to get rid of anger and hatred. If we disperse these emotions, a great deal of suffering will vanish along with them. When we feel grateful, it breaks down anger and we cannot continue to feel hate. That is why this slogan is so effective. It is not difficult to be relaxed and forgiving when conditions are harmonious. However when things go wrong and we feel abused or under stress, we tend to be hostile. Dwelling on our hurt stirs up our aversion and the whole experience becomes totally negative. This can be avoided if we remember the positive potential in the situation.

The adversities that other people bring us are gifts, not betrayals. Disappointments try our patience and compassion. If our lives are completely sheltered and blessed, we have no friction to use as raw material in

our practice. We will never conquer our ego if we are spared from every single upset and provocation. Atisha was known to travel with an attendant who was terribly bad-tempered. The man was irritable and very rude to everyone. People could not understand why a kind and wise teacher like Atisha permitted this nasty man to accompany him on his travels and they asked him how he put up with it. Atisha answered that the man was his “patience tester” and very precious to him.

Our efforts to generate compassion are always in connection with other people and our progress depends on these relationships. The people we live and work with and who share our lives are the sentient beings for whom we seek enlightenment. They are also the means of acquiring wisdom and patience on the way to enlightenment. Rather than feeling insulted or victimized by those who have been unkind to us, we bear the discomfort and feel thankful towards it.

Suffering so often comes from not being able to find the good in things and being critical. If we can be positive about whatever comes, we cling less to the world and are less wounded by bad experiences.

Ultimate Bodhicitta

Adverse conditions can be overcome with the understanding that their disturbing and painful effects are ultimately impermanent and empty. We are inclined to make bad experiences bigger in our minds until they block our vision. By examining our difficulties too closely, we inflate them and feel unable to cope. It is a question of our point of view. When we hold our hand at arm's length in front of us, we see how ordinary it is but the nearer we bring it to our face, the bigger it gets until we cannot see past it or even recognize it as our own hand. If we let things close in on us like this, we lose our equilibrium. Moving to a distance, the problem is still there but it is not obstructing us. The next slogans are about gaining and keeping our perspective.

“See confusion as the four kayas.

The protection of emptiness is unsurpassable.”

Our ordinary mind creates confusion by discriminating between the self and the object but there is another way of relating to the world—we can simply sense the object, without creating the one who experi-

ences it. If our ego is not activated, there is no duality or discrimination. Adverse circumstances are no longer significant because definitions of good and bad are meaningless. Negative reactions and conditions cannot exist if their labels have been discarded. This slogan encourages us to observe the mind as it fastens upon confusion when it is disoriented or disturbed. We cannot find anything which is the mind. The past and future do not define it and the present is only a series of moments passing through the mind. We watch the mind in the moment. This moment is our direct and immediate awareness. In this state of mind things come and go without affecting us. There is no memory or anticipation. If fear comes, we can let it be and the "I" which is afraid disappears. There is no confusion and no one to be confused. The point is that we must learn to see the true nature of things in order to transform their effect on us. If we perceive the truth, it leads to wisdom.

Kaya means "body" and the four kayas are the most difficult thing to explain in all the Buddhist teachings. The part of mind which cannot be conceived or grasped is the dharmakaya: the mind's limitless, formless, and empty quality. Even though

there is nothing to be found, the mind has a radiance and a luminous clarity which radiates from it: this is sambhogakaya. There is no solid structure to the mind but we think ceaselessly and nothing impedes our thoughts: this aspect of the mind's nature is nirmanakaya. These three kayas are related and inseparable. On this level we are beyond the concepts of past, present, and future. This timeless quality is svabhavikakaya. Resting the mind in unborn, unceasing, nonabiding, and timeless awareness is the protection of emptiness which totally removes confusion.

The Special Practices

“Four applications are the best of methods.”

The final way of dissolving adverse conditions is through the four remedies of accumulation, purification, generosity, and making offerings. These provide a powerful support against negativity.

Our reactions are often instinctive and unthinking. Like Pavlov's dog, whose mouth watered when a bell rang because the sound was associated with food, we respond according to our conditioning. It takes time

and determination to change our character. There are no shortcuts.

Accumulation and purification counter our most serious obstacles—aversion towards the things we dislike and attachment to the things we like. Increasing our positive qualities and deeds strengthens our compassion, and our good wishes and thoughts offset the negative emotions. If we are unable to help at the moment, we hope to be of service later. We offer our sincere prayers for all sentient beings. We are making an almost impossible wish: for every being throughout all time and space to have total enlightenment. Only after this great wish do we make smaller prayers: for the world to have peace or for our country, our city, our family, and finally ourselves to have the good things in life.

The Accumulation of Merit

In order to accumulate merit, we need to know what it is. Merit is both a cause and a result. If an action is done with good intentions, inspired by a positive attitude, it gains merit. Thoughts and deeds based on compassion and unselfishness create merit. Those that are motivated by anger, attachment, and ignorance

will not result in merit, but merit can be gained from abandoning these unvirtuous states of mind.

If someone does something positive, they receive good results from their deed and by rejoicing for them, we share in this positive outcome. We earn not some or part of the merit, but all of it. Equally if a wrong has been done and we take pleasure in the action, we are liable for the whole of the negative effect. To produce the best result, we need to create conditions which encourage our good qualities to develop. If we want positive things to happen in the future, we must take positive action now.

I often tell this story because it is so meaningful. During the time of Lord Buddha there was a rich king who planned to arrange an immense offering to the Buddha and all the hundreds of monks who travelled with him. He invited them to be his guests at a special celebration which he held in his beautiful garden. Over many weeks the king made countless gifts of delicious food, clothing, and money to everyone at the gathering. It was the custom of the time to dedicate the merit of any positive actions so that the person who had performed them would receive the credit for their good deeds. At the end of the huge

festival, the king requested that all the merit of the past several weeks be dedicated. The Buddha agreed to do so but he asked the king a very unusual question: "Should I make the dedication for you who have given the material donations and gifts or for the person who has truly gained the most merit?" The king was baffled. He thought the greatest merit should be his since he had arranged the celebration and been so generous to everyone but he replied, "Of course, you must dedicate the merit to whoever deserves it."

The Buddha offered the merit in the name of an old lady, a beggar who had been sitting outside the gate of the garden. People were shocked. Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, questioned him, "Why have you given the merit of this occasion to the beggar woman who did absolutely nothing, and not to the king who has sponsored everything?" The Buddha answered, "The king spent all the money and this lady did not have a rupee to spare but she was joyful that such a grand offering was being made. Since she herself was not giving anything, she had no pride. The king was charitable but he was vain and admired his own positive deeds. The old woman gathered more merit from

her actions than the king himself because she was sincere and humble."

The Purification of Fault

Every error is transitory and can be purified. The moment we admit and regret that an action is harmful and try to be more aware, we have erased the wrongdoing and the negativity. Purification means making a conscious effort to do away with our unwholesome karma by regretting our negative actions or by neutralizing them with positive ones.

In Buddhism, bad deeds are not considered sins and the concept of individual wickedness and guilt does not exist. Guilt has been explained to me by many Western students but it does not really appear in the Tibetan or Buddhist mind. We have no sense that any action is unforgivable. People make mistakes but they can be corrected. Negative impressions are temporary, they can be wiped away. Our mind is basically luminous and stainless like a golden sphere, and negativity only settles on its surface like a film of dust. When the dust is removed, it shines again. There is nothing to feel guilty about and no one to blame when we recognize this basic purity.

Working with our awareness and mindfulness is so important. Remembering what is positive and good is the practice that matters. There is a story that shows how important this is. In Tibet, shepherds had a hard and dangerous life. There were no barns or shelter and they were exposed to very primitive conditions. The shepherd in this story looked after his sheep deep in the mountains. In the neighborhood there was a famous and respected hermit who many people came to see for dharma instruction and the shepherd was inspired to visit this wise teacher. He called upon the hermit and introduced himself, asking for a meditation which would suit someone like him who was unlearned and did not understand anything. The hermit advised him to collect stones, some white and some black. When he was sitting minding his flock, he should watch his thoughts. Were they good or bad? If he had a negative, angry, or mean thought, he was to put a black stone aside. When a good, kind thought came to mind, he should select a white stone. All the black stones would go in one pile and the white in another. "Just keep doing that," said the hermit.

The shepherd returned to his flock and did what the hermit had instructed. Each time he had a thought

he selected a stone. Soon he had a huge collection of black stones but very few white ones. He was so concerned that he rushed back to the hermit and told him it was not working, so many of his thoughts were negative and wicked. The hermit said, "That's fine, carry on. All will be well." The shepherd continued, each day observing his good and bad thoughts and slowly the number of black pebbles dwindled and the white pebbles increased. Watching our state of mind changes our consciousness.

All dharma practices, both accumulation and purification, are indispensable but there are other practical approaches for increasing our merit and purifying the mind and these include refuge. When we say someone is a Buddhist, traditionally we mean that they have "taken refuge." This is something like making a spiritual promise to oneself. For our own sake and for the benefit of sentient beings we take refuge in the Buddha as our teacher, the dharma teachings as our path, and the sangha which follows these teachings as our community. The Buddha is our example and guide; we undertake to study and apply what he taught to develop the positive qualities already within us into enlightened wisdom and compassion. We

practice the dharma texts and meditation instructions as the means of freeing our mind from samsaric suffering. Receiving support, encouragement, and friendship from others on the path is going for refuge in the sangha.

Showing Generosity towards Harmful Influences

It is no use trying to sidestep harmful elements. They are inescapable, but in every threatening situation we can exercise our generosity and compassion. Another means of exchanging oneself for others and developing unselfish compassion is through special rituals like *Chöd*, where we “cut” through ego and attachment by offering our body and possessions for the sake of all beings. Demons, evil spirits, and other negative forces are visualized surrounding us. Instead of protecting ourselves against them, they are invited to feast upon us so that all our negative habits can be exposed and destroyed. In return for the harm they represent, we give them help. The meaning behind such ceremonies is that we gain more from facing adversity than from resisting it. Rather than defending ourselves, we surrender to those who seek to persecute us. The less we try to shield ourselves, the more

invincible we become. It is quite simple: no one can chase us if we do not run away. In the worst circumstances, if we dare to risk everything and give ourselves up, our fear is over.

There is a well-known story about Jetsun Milarepa, a great yogi, poet, and saint of the Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist tradition who lived in Tibet eight hundred years ago. He stayed in a cave for long periods and during these retreats he encountered many tests of his meditation practice. One day, he left his retreat in search of firewood. On his return he found that three evil spirits had occupied his cave. They had large heads and even larger eyes. They looked frightful. He said prayers to send them away but they would not leave. He ordered them to go using various methods and different mantras but nothing worked. Suddenly he felt ashamed. His spiritual training had taught him that everything was an empty manifestation of his mind. Yet here he was, scolding and rejecting these beings. He had lived every day of his life with the biggest evil spirit of all, the ego, so why not live with these little spirit ghosts too. When he was able to recognize them as his own thoughts, they disappeared.

Whatever mistreatment we receive is the karmic re-

sult of injuries we have caused in the past. Our former conduct has drawn these results back to us but the worse our circumstances, the more powerful our practice will be. As we let our negative situation stand for the misery of other beings, we steadily drain the source of suffering.

*Making Offerings to the
Protectors, Dakas, and Dakinis*

As well as placing ourselves at the disposal of negative forces in order to pacify them, we also dedicate our positive attitude, prayers, and resources to the helpful wisdom beings. Whenever good things happen to us, they are offered to make this good fortune widespread. The merit of our good actions is dedicated for the sake of others. We honor whatever spiritual being we believe in by asking for blessings. This fortifies our good qualities.

The Sanskrit words *daka* and *dakini* refer to enlightened energy and activity embodied as sky spirits in male and female form. Food or money offerings made to them and to the dharma protectors remove attachment to the self and encourage us to abandon hopes and fears. If it is necessary to face sickness or death,

we accept it. We make our life an offering. Sometimes by praying and practicing with all our heart, our problem solves itself. A monk who was a student of Jamgon Khyentse the Great was passing through an area near the southern border of Tibet on a pilgrimage. In those days, pilgrims travelling on foot could not carry many supplies so they relied on getting food from people along the way. This monk had with him a damaru drum used in the *Chöd* practice and approaching some local villagers, hoping to persuade them to feed him, he claimed he was a great master. After he had eaten the meal they pushed him into a dark, underground room and locked him in. The place was full of dead bodies. He was terrified. All he could think to do was to climb up to the highest rafters and call desperately, over and over again, for his teacher and lama Jamgon Khyentse to come and save him. Suddenly the corpses began to gush and whistle and move about. These noises finally stopped but he had a sleepless night. In the morning he climbed down, made a pile of the corpses, and sat down upon them. Blowing his thighbone trumpet very fiercely and beating his drum as loudly as possible, he chanted the meditation text. Everybody who heard him was con-

vinced that he was a great *Chöd-pa* lama and he became famous in the area. When he later encountered his guru, the lama smiled at him and said, "We had a bad time in that place, didn't we?"

*"To bring the unexpected obstacles to the path,
prepare by training now."*

We are practicing in a turbulent and difficult world and, with a little discipline, this training comes to mind and helps us with our lives. If we claim we are too upset or confused to do the meditation, then we are lacking motivation. Lojong is not theoretical, it does not matter how hard we have studied or the time we spend thinking about meditating. The training is about putting the teachings to work and applying them to actual, real situations.

Unforeseen obstacles call for creativity. A Chinese saying describes this as "every crisis is an opportunity." When anything troublesome is brought into our training, the negativity does not become worse, it becomes practice. The smallest nuisance, injury, or even a momentary upset can all be put to use with the intention of clearing suffering away for all other beings. We start now, not waiting until tomorrow or the next

day, so that we are ready for any eventuality and can recall tonglen when suffering takes us by surprise. It is not only negative obstacles we exchange. We also give away our happiness and enthusiasm. If we have something beautiful, we breathe out and donate our joy and delight to all the beings in the universe.

THE FOURTH POINT

THE ESSENCE OF PRACTICE IN LIFE AND AT DEATH

HERE ARE many things to remember in this practice and sometimes we can lose our way, so this point is an overview of the essential aspects of Mind Training. The forces or strengths explained here are the whole practice concentrated into a very concise form. These are key slogans that help us to return to our meditation throughout our daily activities, when our death approaches, and during the process of dying. No matter how exact the instructions we are given, we acquire the training by doing the practice. It is a method that we can rely on at every stage of our lives.

Gampopa was the favored and best student of Jetsun Milarepa. When he had finished his studies and the time had come for him to leave his teacher and

begin his independent practice, Milarepa came to bid him farewell and told him, "I have not given you my very highest teaching. It is too secret and you are not yet ready for it." Gampopa was very despondent about this, but he was unable to persuade Milarepa to change his mind and eventually he set off to cross the river on his journey. Suddenly his teacher called him back. Since Gampopa was his closest disciple and the one who would carry on his work, he said he had decided to give him the special teaching after all. As Gampopa made offerings out of respect and love, Milarepa turned his back, lifted his robe, and exposed his bare buttocks saying, ". . . this is my most secret teaching." Gampopa was startled to see that his teacher's backside had become callused and as hard as rock from all the sitting meditation he had done.

The Five Forces

"Train in the five forces."

In the earlier stages of the practice, we began to realize the positive benefits of working with the mind and developing generosity. Now we commit ourselves to

maintaining all the good habits and qualities we have acquired. Each time we recall the forces our understanding goes higher, while our actions become more down to earth.

The Force of Impetus

This promotes our belief in the need to practice dharma. It helps us to see the value of it and to persevere with it. With this energy we understand where our training will take us and what it is meant to achieve. We need an incentive to bring ourselves back to the reasons for our spiritual work. Without it, our training can turn into a boring routine or a ritual which has little or no meaning. At times, we may feel very inspired but this wears off and we need to maintain our momentum so that we do not neglect our practice or feel in conflict about it.

The Force of Familiarization

We should feel so comfortable with our practice that it becomes “second nature.” We repeat and carry out our dharma activities as a regular and normal part of ordinary life and, as we get used to it, Lojong merges with everything we do. Meditation is not something

alien or separate from us. It is all about us. We are the practice and everything we know and meet is also the practice.

The Force of Virtue

Never be complacent about doing worthwhile things. Aim to seek out and use every possibility to develop compassion. This force gives us the determination to practice skillful thoughts and actions from this moment until enlightenment. We dedicate ourselves to sowing good seeds repeatedly and accumulating virtue constantly. In every hour, day, month, and year of our lives we pledge to free all beings from suffering. At every New Year we remember this. If our motivation remains strong, we can move mountains.

The Force of Repudiation

From the beginning of time suffering has come from our ego-clinging and aversion to suffering. We defeat these illusions by abandoning our selfishness and self-cherishing. This force is directed at completely disowning the ego and its influence.

The Force of Prayer and Aspiration

As thoughts are the seeds of actions, prayer is a major agent in meditation practice to improve our devotion and increase our good intentions. It is not a petition to someone for relief but a directed wish for something to evolve and be beneficial. Nevertheless, we should be careful what we wish for. If we do not make wishes properly, we will ask for the wrong things. A short story called "The Monkey's Paw" warns us about this. One stormy night a stranger knocked at the door of an old couple living in a small cottage and requested shelter from the rain. The couple invited him in. He was agitated and very restless. When they asked him what was the matter, he said he felt nervous because he had in his possession a monkey's paw that would grant him three wishes and he was terrified he would ask for something foolish. They suggested that he give the paw to them if he was so uneasy and they would make good use of it. He gladly gave it and with great relief left the cottage. The couple made their first wish, asking for lots of money. The next morning, they had another visitor. Their son's employer had come to tell them that he had been

killed in an accident and to deliver a great deal of money in compensation. Their first request had been granted but their son was dead. They grieved for some time but soon remembered that they had two other wishes and quickly used the second to ask for their son to be returned to them. After a while there was a terrible noise and, looking out of the window, they saw that he had come out of his grave. He was a zombie. They were horrified and quickly used their final wish to send him back to his burial ground in peace. With this, all their wishes were gone.

If we pray for our spiritual activity to eventually bear fruit, it does not matter if we cannot yet create positive results. We may intend to act well but sometimes the conditions are not right or we lack the capacity. We can still wish for better opportunities in the future to accumulate merit.

*“The instructions for how to die properly
are the five forces.”*

Just as they provide a structure of practice for life, the forces also guide us at our death. As we are about to die we use them to help us but we apply them in a slightly different order.

The Force of Virtue

When our death is approaching, we try to perform as many wholesome deeds as possible. Distributing our wealth and possessions and making offerings of all kinds increase our merit. Holding nothing back, we give away everything, abandoning all our attachments at the end of our life. A man who was nearing death in Tibet asked for all his gold and silver to be brought to his room and put under his pillow. He could not take it with him but he hated to leave it and wanted it nearby. He suffered terribly because he was going to be parted from his wealth. This is an attachment we can do without. Generosity frees us from clinging to our material surroundings. If we have no wealth to share, we offer the precious merit of all our good actions and thoughts in this lifetime.

The Force of Repudiation

The sadness that we may feel as we face death occurs because we are attached to the physical body as our home and identity. Any anguish and distress we suffer when we are dying comes from the belief that we are losing a real, objective world and a beloved self. If

nothing actually exists, then nothing dies so we must remind ourselves that our fear of death is due to a misunderstanding about life, caused by the ego. This body has never been ours. Trusting in our awareness of emptiness, we let go in order to become fearless and unattached. Sometimes people hold on and cannot die properly. That is not necessary. We can be at ease.

The Force of Aspiration

At our death, we pray for a steadfast and enduring compassion in our next rebirth. We dedicate all the good deeds of this lifetime for the welfare of other beings. These prayers are very important at death. If we have neglected to accomplish many worthwhile things this time, we can vow to use the conditions we meet in the future to be more active in creating happiness.

The Force of Impetus

This gives us the determination to continue to practice compassion as our meditation until our very last breath. Such thoughts minimize delusion in the after-death, bardo state and yield benefits in our next reincarnation. We pray for the strength to awaken and

sustain our compassion as our life draws to an end, to achieve enlightened wisdom during death and in our next rebirth.

The Force of Familiarization

When we are close to death and while dying, we continue to carry out our usual method of meditation. The practice that we are familiar and most comfortable with as part of our daily routine is the best support during the process of death. It allows us to work with our mind right to the end.

Meditation at Death: Phowa

There are also explicit meditation practices which can be applied at the time of death. In phowa, a specific technique which leads to the transference of consciousness, both concentration and confidence are very important. The mind must be focused on ultimate bodhicitta.

This is the best type of phowa practice because it expresses compassion, the essential nature of the enlightened mind. Doing this meditation will eventually lead us to the realization of our Buddha-Nature. The practice itself is quite simple. Lying on the right side

with the right nostril blocked by the right little finger, we do the tonglen exchange, taking on negative energy and sending positive wishes in return. We cut off all attachment and clinging to the things around us. None of our loved ones, friends, or relatives will be able to help us in any way at death. We are alone. We remind ourselves that birth and death are simply projections of mind. The illusion and the finality of death are created by the mind. Looking at the sky, we relax and rest our mind in boundless space.

Phowa is a practice which should be done repeatedly, all through our lives so that we can do it naturally and purposefully at the time of death. I have heard a story about a Tibetan who was dying and his family called the lama to be with him. The lama sat beside him and told him to think only of his root guru and forget everything else. He said, "I can't recall my guru, I can only think of a sizzling sausage being warmed in the ashes of a fire." The lama was very skillful: "That is excellent!" he said. "Dewachen, the paradise of the Amitaba Buddha, is full of sausages, they grow on every tree. You only have to open your mouth and you will have all the sausages you want. The color of Amitaba is like the embers of a fire, so

think of him and you will go to his realm." It is said that the man went straight to the pure land of Dewachen.

THE FIFTH POINT

EVALUATING THE PRACTICE

When we have learned how to practice the Lojong meditation, we need to assess whether we are carrying it out correctly and properly. This point gives us something to measure by.

“All dharmas agree at one point.”

Every school and tradition of Buddhism agrees that the benefit of dharma practice is to reduce ego-clinging and the illusion of self. This is the path, the goal, and the purpose of our spiritual life. From ignorance we have constructed the illusion of a separate, independent identity. This strong samsaric ego is the main target of our spiritual work. Lojong removes attachment and selfishness. Egolessness is a profound teaching but if we find that we are more aware of others'

problems and even the least bit less self-involved, we will know we are on the right path.

"Rely upon the better of two witnesses."

When we review our progress, we can either make our own decision about how well we are getting on or listen to the opinion of other people. No one knows us better than we ourselves do so the most stable and reliable view is our own. Westerners have been taught to mistrust their subjective opinion and to believe that an objective, exterior assessment is more accurate. This may be true in some cases, but in this training we need to develop faith and trust in our estimate of ourselves, regardless of what people around us think. Someone judging our behavior may praise or blame us but they cannot weigh up the particular reasons for our actions. What they say about us is never conclusive. As long as we are honest, our own standards are the ones that matter.

"Always be sustained by cheerfulness."

The effectiveness of our practice can be measured by looking at our mood. If we are in better spirits, the

practice is working. We can take heart because we have a purpose, to exchange whatever sadness we meet for joy. The smallest personal damage can be put to use to dissolve great suffering and do away with negativity. If there is a way, we try to stop unfortunate things from happening, but when unhappy events occur we meet them optimistically. We never let negativity discourage us or injure our ability to help.

Setting out on any adventure demands determination. We may have to toil and struggle with setbacks along the way but the trials we face are short-lived. We can endure them because we have a great end in mind: to benefit all sentient beings. Remaining good-natured and enthusiastic shows that our efforts are succeeding. Being cheerful is the sign of a good practitioner.

*“You are well trained if you can practice
even when distracted.”*

The training will be going very well if the demands and complications we meet in everyday life turn our mind spontaneously to the meditation. It is easy to be diverted by the pleasures or pressures of the world and these undermine our meditation unless we use

the slogans consistently. However intense or disturbing the distractions, we maintain and carry out our practice. We train so thoroughly and often that our mind naturally remembers Lojong no matter what comes.

THE SIXTH POINT

DISCIPLINE

MODESTY and reserve are needed as we train. The slogans of the sixth point show us the unwholesome attitudes or inclinations that may interfere with our practice. The mind is not always receptive or cooperative and we need to constantly review our attitude and ethical outlook.

“Practice the three basic principles.”

Keep the discipline of dharma teachings.

Refrain from outrageous actions.

Avoid being one-sided.

Our point of reference is always the fundamental dharma teachings that are part of practice at every level. Keeping our refuge vows and the other spiritual commitments we have made reinforces all our spiritual work. The intention to help all sentient beings is

very important in steering our behavior. It gives us the stability and the faith to complete the training and eliminate every obstacle.

Self-control and moderation are necessary because we are not fully realized beings. There are many dramatic stories about gurus or yogis in the past who presented themselves in unconventional ways, but we do not yet have their wisdom and we are deluding ourselves if we try to imitate them by acting extravagantly. Flamboyant behavior is unlikely to bring any merit. Always try to be authentic and modest. At the same time, we should not be too judgmental or disapproving of the excessive displays of other people. It is impossible to know what may be inspiring them. The Buddha himself said that there were many hidden enlightened beings in this world and anyone we meet could be a spiritual master.

Our compassion is offered to every sentient being, unconditionally and equally. No one is preferred and no one excluded. If our thoughts are one-sided, we “pick and choose” between things and such prejudices show that the ego has taken over. Refusing to tolerate certain things because they make us uncomfortable or seeking out situations that we can easily

manage is not being impartial. Our practice also suffers from bias if we meditate when we are happy and stop meditating when we are unhappy—or the opposite, if we only feel like practicing when we are in trouble. This motto is about trying to remain receptive in every situation, taking whatever comes and continuing to practice steadily.

“Change your attitude but remain natural.”

As our compassion matures we must not become self-conscious, or set ourselves apart from other people. The more skillful we get, the less it should show. While our outer behavior remains consistent and unaffected, the transformation goes on within us. There is no reason to take any drastic steps. We do not have to change our way of life. No one is suggesting that we give up our home or our place in society. Patrul Rinpoche wrote a beautiful stanza about this. In it he says that dharma practice is not like creating a golden ornament, which needs special tools and workmanship. It is just silently mixing yourself with the dharma without making any show of it.

“Do not talk about weak points.”

It is not constructive to discuss the defects of others. In both our private and our spiritual relationships, we must mind our words. Each one of us has limitations. We may expect to meet compassionate and wise people when we visit Buddhist meditation centers but we are just as likely to encounter people who seem to be struggling with great doubts and difficulties. We all have deficiencies and broadcasting the inadequacy of other people displaces our annoyance with our own deficiencies but solves nothing.

“Do not ponder others’ faults.”

When our mind is occupied by negative thoughts, everything we encounter seems tainted. If we are looking for flaws, we will find them but any defects we find are reflections of the impurity of our own mind. Judging someone else’s imperfections exaggerates their blemishes and overlooks their true worth. We must never lose sight of their good qualities. Our negative reaction should be counteracted by looking for the person’s positive virtues. Having pledged to help all beings and spare them from every harm, rather than finding fault we acknowledge our own imperfect attitude.

“Work on your greatest defilement first.”

In taming our mind it makes good sense to try to deal with our worst imperfection first. We concentrate on whatever negative tendency or habitual pattern is the strongest and most prominent in our character. It is not practical to expect to clear up all our defilements at once but by setting to work with the most insistent one, we build up our skill and stamina. Having overcome the worst obstacle, we can go on to patiently deal with our other shortcomings.

“Give up hoping for results.”

Ambition and expectation hinder our training. Meditation with an expected outcome is not meditation. If we speculate about the effects of our spiritual work, it leads us astray. The benefits of practice cannot be planned, they come by themselves. Running after results only repeats the cycles of attachment and aversion which we are trying to break free from. There is no destination on the dharma path nor anything to aim for. Everything we need is present inside us, not somewhere ahead of us.

"Refrain from poisonous food."

We eat for our health, to grow and to survive. If the food we consume is contaminated, it will make us ill. Lojong is like nourishing food. It should sustain us and make us strong but if the motive behind our training is wrong, what is supposed to be wholesome turns to poison and the practice will not work. Transferring our ego's attachment and craving to the meditation makes the practice unhealthy. In modern society various customs and institutions have decayed in this way. Respected traditions have declined because their founding ideals have become degraded. The same is true in our dharma lives; the ego can make us forgetful or lead us into doubt and this compromises our efforts. Remembering the four preliminary thoughts, the emptiness of all phenomena, and the nonexistence of any separate self protects the integrity of our meditation.

"Do not be predictable."

This particular slogan is very difficult to translate from the Tibetan language into English without losing sight of what is meant. It cautions us against

falling back on easy habits. It is our conditioning to repeat negative patterns over and over again. We suffer from reproducing the same unthinking and unskillful reactions to situations. Preserving our grievances, bearing grudges, and trying to evade negative events are all ego defenses that we have adopted in the past. Lojong is about finding alternatives to these automatic reflexes. The predictable reaction is to repay people who are good to us with kindness and to protest and strike back at unkindness. Being tolerant and patient when someone has wounded us is a much more creative and farsighted response. It may even result in an enemy becoming a friend but if that is not so, we will still enjoy the tranquility of forgiveness.

“Forsake ridicule and cutting remarks.”

We make malicious comments more easily than we praise or compliment people but these spiteful remarks are very wounding and regrettable. Communicating in a sarcastic way injures our empathy with others and we need to be less impulsive in our speech. So many enemies have been made and friendships broken with scornful words. Arguing and contradicting come from the same thoughtless impulse to

malign others. We may feel superior and clever for a brief time but this kind of small talk is unskillful and a sign of pride. There will be distrust in our relationships unless we learn to criticize less. Our speech should be thoughtful; it is an indispensable vehicle for exercising compassion.

"Do not wait in ambush."

Holding on to a sense of injury in anticipation of the opportunity to get revenge is not living up to our training. It is wrong to meet abuse or injury with retaliation. Storing up anger and hatred, biding our time for the chance to hit back if we have been insulted or offended, cannot bring us any consolation or relief. It simply increases our suffering. What is the use of prolonging the negative situation? It is better to forget ill-treatment. We will be happier.

"Do not strike at the sore point."

These slogans are not always meant to be taken literally. This one is about refraining from aggressively emphasizing other people's problems. Humiliating them makes no difference to the situation. We are inflicting pain when we exaggerate faults or wish

people ill. Attacking their limitations does not ease their pain, it only amplifies and increases suffering. By “rubbing it in,” we are making things harder and more distressing for them.

“Do not transfer the ox’s load to the cow.”

We must shoulder our own responsibilities and not try to shift our burdens onto other people or force them to do our work. The cow has not the strength to carry the ox’s load and trying to avoid our obligations, by asking someone else to take them on, does us no credit. One way or another, we have the resources and ability to manage. With our inventive minds we can redistribute the load.

“Do not try to be the fastest.”

There is already too much competition in the world. We do not need to be the “best.” We can allow someone else to succeed. Comparing ourselves with others does not enhance our practice in the slightest. It is as pointless as chasing the results of meditation, mentioned in an earlier slogan. Being envious or jealous of other people’s spiritual achievements or trying to outdo them does not help us. This is not a race or a

contest. We are not trying to get ahead, we are simply watching our mind.

"Do not act with twisted motives."

We ourselves can think of all sorts of examples of losing our purity of heart. If we are devious and stray into manipulation or use diplomacy and clever reasoning to hide our real motives, it is dishonest and shows we have forgotten the reason for our training. When our attitude to practice is distorted, we are deprived of its benefits.

"Do not make gods into demons."

Lojong is intended to subdue the mind poisons. It should make us calm, compassionate, and kind. If the practice increases our vanity and arrogance, we have used it to build up our ego and this turns something pure into something base and negative. The god has become a demon. All the slogans which deal with discipline and commitment are about observing the mind and what it is doing in a vigilant way so that the basis of our practice does not become impaired. Deterioration can happen without warning; we must beware of this and watch our humility.

“Do not seek another’s pain as the instrument of your happiness.”

If we try to gain in any way from the pain or misfortune of someone else, it discredits our compassion for others and all the ideals of this training. It is the total opposite of wishing them well and rejoicing in their happiness. We need to protect our mind against slipping into such a negative state that we completely miss the path and make things much worse. Suffering which falls on someone else should never give us pleasure. If we enjoy another’s bad luck or profit at their expense, it will not give us one second of happiness. Instead, it sets back our spiritual improvement. The unhappiness of any sentient being should be something of deep regret to us.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. It is difficult to change my attitude. I don’t criticize others but I blame myself for my miserable situation and feel self-hatred. I am attached to my character be-

cause it confirms that I exist and the idea of changing feels very threatening.

A. It takes time to change our habits and conditioning. The external world has disappointed us and that is why we are training the mind: to establish a new attitude and see things differently. We have nothing to lose but our negative reactions to life. Facing setbacks or adversity usually makes us feel defensive and miserable. The best way to understand these feelings is to recognize that they are caused by aversion, attachment, and ignorance. Our character is not fixed, it can be changed in an instant but we won't risk changing because we are so attached to our self. The slogan about blaming the ego is very important. The ego is responsible for cutting off the possibility of doing something more genuine and interesting with our energy. I have only heard about the self-hatred you mention in the West and I think it comes from having expectations that are too high. There is a culture here of "everything is possible" so when you do not achieve what you are capable of, you feel self-hatred. This is another form of attachment and aversion, a kind of blindness. Try to understand it. Who is the ha-

tered really directed at? Explore it, go round it or even disregard it for a minute and there is a good chance you will see beyond it.

Q. Can you explain the difference between letting go of the emotions and suppressing them?

A. When we suppress something, we are actually deeply involved with it. Either we feel fascinated and cling to the emotion or we are transfixed by our aversion to it. Whatever our reaction, the emotion has taken us over. Repressing an emotion is a way of keeping it close and refusing to abandon it. We stay in touch with it. It is something like being in a boxing match where we maintain the closest contact in order to push off and fight our opponent. When we really let the emotion loose, it disappears completely without a trace and we forget it. We are not holding on to anything. There is no sense of resistance or restraint. As we release it, the emotion naturally flows away. That is freedom.

Q. How do you let go of emotions of grief or loss?

A. You just let them go. It is the same with any suffering from the past. This story may be helpful. During

the time of Lord Buddha, there was a family who were very well known in their community because they lived so happily together. The father, mother, son, and the son's wife were an example to their whole village. There were never any rows or arguments between them. Suddenly and unexpectedly one day, the son died. All the neighbors and villagers were terribly concerned. Thinking the family would be devastated, a group of them went to offer their deepest sympathies. When the delegation from the village arrived at the family's home everything looked as usual. No one was mourning or in tears. The son's wife was carrying a jug of water up from the river and she was singing. The villagers were amazed and asked why the family was not upset by their loss. The mother and father and daughter-in-law all said the same thing: "We always knew we would only be with him for a short while. Our time together was temporary and we could be parted at any moment. This gave us harmony and we got along with each other without any disputes. Now he has died but we knew that would happen and there are no regrets. We were always cordial and kind towards each other. He is gone but we have no reason to be sad." If we remember to treat each other this way

in our own families and communities, we will be very much happier together. After all, we are not going to be here forever. Why fight? It makes more sense to be affectionate in the brief time we have and, if we behave well, there is less reason for remorse when a friend or relation leaves this world.

Q. If someone has a weakness or a fault which causes suffering for other people, can you ask them to change?

A. Of course you can ask people to change but it might not work. They may not want to change or they may see no reason to change. Helping them to solve their problem would be more useful. If you point out their imperfection and they deny it, this might lead to a quarrel. Maybe the fault is really a strength and only you think it is a weakness. That is also possible.

Q. Is there such a thing as collective consciousness?

A. You and I can probably agree that there is individual consciousness and that each of us assimilates things in a personal and slightly different way. As a former statesman once said, every public announcement has four versions: the intended message, the ac-

tual message, the message people understood, and the message as it was later reported. In Buddhism, anything shared is regarded as "collective karma" which is the result of past actions and effects. "Collective" signifies something similar rather than an identical psychological bond between people. So, we might say a similar karmic link or consciousness has brought us all here and we have this experience in common. That is not collective consciousness as I think it is meant in the West. Buddhism is very individualistic. There are monastic and spiritual communities and group ceremonies but you can be a good Buddhist without them. You can request guidance from qualified teachers but working with your emotional and mental state is something you do on your own. It is a personal choice. Another distinctive aspect of Buddhism is the absence of dogma. Many religions are based on the words of a god or gods revealed as truths to followers who are expected to respond with faith and veneration but never to analyze whether the truths are relevant to their own experience. The Buddhist path is very different; it encourages people to investigate the teachings, to think about them and question them until they reach their own certainty.

Q. How do we integrate meditation into everyday life? It seems a very intellectual process and people in the West are already so intellectual. Don't we need something more practical?

A. When you have a dharma practice and understand how to do it, it is not difficult to follow it in your ordinary life. Meditation is very sophisticated and sensitive but it is also sensible. Basically you let your mind be. If you try to feel calm or nice, you are creating expectations not doing meditation. Instead, you stop expecting anything. There is no effort or stress. You can meditate anywhere: on vacation, at work, in your car at a red light. If we intellectualize too much, we will not accomplish anything profound. What I am describing is an effort to loosen our grasp. Meditation comes as a relief, like resting after hard work. We let our thoughts appear and disappear by themselves. It does not matter which meditation method we use. The process comes from within. It is not something we achieve over time or a program we are working on. We do not know how long it will take but it takes practice.

Q. Why is it so tiring to do nothing? Even in meditation I feel sleepy or I get back pain.

A. Doing nothing should be very pleasant but I have noticed that not many people know how to do nothing. We need to learn how to rest. When we first sit in meditation, a few minutes feel like a very long time because we are inexperienced. Meditating in the seven-point position should never be physically painful. It is quite comfortable when you get used to it and it enables you to sit for long periods. We meditate with the mind, not the body and this posture creates ideal conditions for our mind. Walking meditation is also very good, especially for people who are just beginning.

Q. What is enlightenment?

A. Many people ask me if they can become enlightened. I do not know. I am not enlightened. Maybe you can, maybe not. Buddhism is about trying to find a way to eliminate all our problems. If there is a problem, it must have both a cause and a solution. When we talk about enlightenment we are talking about reaching a state of mind where there are no more problems.

THE SEVENTH POINT

GUIDELINES

*“All activities should be done
with the intention of helping others.”*

ACTING with compassion and a pure motivation in everything we do will always have a positive effect. Our intentions are more powerful than any actual deed and our willingness to help others will always lead to a good outcome. If we act with unworthy or selfish impulses, the results will be poor even if superficially our conduct seems good.

“Correct all wrongs with one intention.”

We correct whatever troubles we have and remove obstacles by working through them using tonglen. Illness, bad relationships, or painful events are all useful to represent the wounds and sorrows

of everyone in the world. Each difficulty is material for our meditation and can be solved within our meditation.

Taking negativity, doubts, and adversity into our practice is a powerful protection against suffering. At the same time, we do not forget that compassion is the essence of our meditation and we hope and trust that our struggles will be sufficient to spare all sentient beings from their present or future misery.

“Two activities, at the beginning and at the end.”

As we wake in the morning and before we go to sleep at night, we remind ourselves that our goal is to develop and realize compassion. This is all we need. Other meditations and mantras are useful but it is only compassion that embodies the very deepest wisdom. To carry out our decision to liberate every sentient being, our day should begin and end with the thought of removing all suffering for everyone, forever. We are not working for the sake of one person or one country or even one world. Our vow is to seek absolute freedom for a limitless number of beings, in all the worlds and for all time. If we renew our prom-

ise to do this, day by day, nothing else is necessary. Compassion is the practice.

“Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.”

It is important to persevere with our training. Our lives may be going well or badly but neither of these conditions are long term. Circumstances that are promising and those that seem threatening are equally the result of our past actions. These karmic returns are impermanent, they will wear out. We take each gain and loss into the practice. We also need patience when we are in a very joyful state of mind. Happiness can make us feel so elated that we become insensitive and careless. During our good times, when things are going well for us, we should want the same fortunate situation for others. Dedicating our joy, we renew our intention to create auspicious results in the future.

*“Observe these two even at the risk
of the loss of your life.”*

Bodhisattva commitments and the general refuge vows are the two essential guides to enlightenment. They have the highest priority and we must observe

and respect them. They need to be protected under all circumstances and in the face of any hazard.

We have made a promise to cultivate unselfish compassion gradually, according to our ability. As we practice being generous in small ways, eventually we will be able to offer things that are very dear to us. Our compassion can become so great that we are ready to give up anything for the sake of other beings. Sometimes we cannot live up to these ideals but there is no reason to feel dispirited. We are the practice and working with ourselves is what matters. Every positive action is praiseworthy. Our faults in the past have been far worse and our present limitations are not so serious. Without being self-critical, we continue trying to improve.

“Train in the three difficulties.”

The three difficulties in this slogan are related to managing the negativity that ignorance, hatred, desire, jealousy, and pride produce. It is difficult to understand and recognize these emotions when they first arise. Once they have appeared, they are hard to handle. Finally, they are difficult to uproot completely from our thoughts. Emotional states of mind cause us and

others the most acute suffering unless we try to see them clearly, neutralize their power, and remove them.

“Take up the three essential factors.”

Three things are essential to dharma training. A teacher, a practice we can apply our mind to, and a secure environment. We must have a good spiritual friend who will instruct us. It is also important to find a suitable meditation practice and to carry it out correctly. Finally, we need the relative leisure and resources that will give us a reasonable background for our practice: a place to live, food, and clothing. These are the necessities for training, there is nothing else we need.

“Do not allow three things to weaken.”

Devotion and respect for our teacher is the first thing to keep strong. If we falter in our devotion or feel doubts about our guru, the ego reclaims its hold over us. The second thing to maintain is our enthusiasm and trust in the method of meditation. Our dharma commitments and vows are the third thing to carefully preserve. With these three elements firmly in place, we ensure that the practice is stable.

“Keep the three inseparable.”

Mind Training is meant to be inclusive and comprehensive. We are training to accomplish virtue with our whole being: our body, speech, and mind. All the thoughts, words, and actions that arise from these three are dedicated to accumulating merit and avoiding harmful actions and results.

*“Train in all areas, without partiality.
Do this pervasively.”*

Training needs to be kept up in every situation. We should continue to practice no matter if our environment and state of mind are comfortable or chaotic, good or bad. We must also remember to be unbiased and generous. The effort we make is for everyone, everywhere. There is no distinction in the training between friends and enemies and no exceptions. We are becoming proficient in this practice for all beings, at all times.

“Meditate on subjects which provoke you.”

Annoying and painful situations provide the best subjects for practice. They help us by removing our

aversion, fear, and egotism. If we try to exclude or dismiss subjects because they are upsetting, we have missed a chance to enrich our meditation and reduce suffering. We put our anger in place of the anger of all sentient beings so that they can become totally free from anger. We are so angry that no one else needs to be angry ever again. Our anger takes up all the anger in the world. When no one is angry except us, we cannot be angry anymore. This works with any emotion. By facing it outside we can look at it, break its hold over us, and let it go.

“Do not be swayed by external circumstances.”

We are bound to be influenced by our surroundings. We can only do our best to create a favorable practice environment. In the long term we are trying to find an equilibrium that is unaffected by conditions around us. The practice teaches us to maintain a continual flow of awareness through the meditation, whatever the distraction. No special arrangement or setting is necessary. If the situation around us is disturbing or obstructive, our composure and faith in the training see us through. Whatever the external circumstances, Lojong will be helpful.

“Practice the important points now.”

We have missed our chances to benefit from the dharma before and it is our good fortune to have encountered the Lojong teaching in this lifetime. Conditions in the future will never be better than they are now. This is our opportunity. The training only bears fruit if we apply it, at once and without delay. The important things to remember are: generating compassion for the welfare of other beings, developing the bodhicitta which leads to liberation from samsara, and practicing according to the direct guidance of the teacher rather than blindly following the written text. Another story about Atisha shows how important this last element is.

Atisha had first come to Tibet at the invitation of the family of a Tibetan king. His translator for the visit was a very distinguished scholar and Atisha quizzed this man about which spiritual practices he had been given. The translator reported a long, impressive list of the teachings that he had received. Atisha was amazed and he wondered aloud, “Why have I been invited here? You seem to have all the teachings you need already.” He then asked his companion, “How

do you do all these different meditations?" The translator replied, "According to the instructions in the text." Atisha said, "I see. That must be the reason I have been asked to come here."

"Do not misapprehend."

These words counsel us against getting our priorities mixed up. An incomplete understanding of Lo-jong can result in our practice being subverted. These six errors affect our dedication to the training.

To be very patient with worldly concerns such as business, arguments, and other material matters but not patient towards dharma practice and our own meditation is mistaken patience.

To aspire only for immediate pleasure and comfort and not for the long-term welfare and richness brought by dharma practice is mistaken aspiration.

To enjoy the pleasure of sensual desires but not to taste the pleasure of learning, reflection, and meditation is mistaken enjoyment.

To feel compassion for those who face hardship while doing good deeds and not feel compassion towards those who do negative deeds is mistaken compassion.

To try and acquire worldly gains for those who are near and dear to you but not to bring them to dharma is mistaken caretaking.

To rejoice at your enemies' misfortune and pain and not to rejoice at people's achievements or virtue is mistaken joy.

"Be firm. Train wholeheartedly."

We must be diligent when examining the results of our spiritual work. Whether the practice produces improvements or setbacks, we take it in our stride.

It is important to stay committed. In ordinary life, our mind is so excitable that the disturbing thoughts catch us unprepared and suddenly we are taken in by them. Turbulent emotions are erratic and it is difficult to control or observe them dispassionately. Lojong gives us the means to explore the mind and the emotions in a detached way. We train with the conviction that this will liberate us. Trust in the practice.

"Free yourself by examining and investigating."

Only by inspecting the mind can we reach a direct understanding of how negativity and illusion arise. We need to be watchful. As we recognize disturbing

mental events, they can be neutralized by applying the necessary remedies—in particular, exchanging oneself for others. By repeatedly searching out and facing our emotional limitations, the mind is freed and the painful duality of attachment and aversion is brought to an end.

“Do not indulge in self-pity.”

When things are not going well, we may develop feelings of imbalance in the practice. We must not despair or feel sorry for ourselves. If we are putting others' interests and welfare before our own, we are not entitled to any reward from them. Envy of other people, the desire for greater benefits, or a lack of appreciation about our own opportunities are all barriers standing in the way of selflessness. If we are dissatisfied, we bring this into the practice and use it to represent the frustration of all other beings.

“Do not be jealous or irritable.”

We must be careful to turn away jealousy and exasperation. They are both very intense forms of self-clinging and help nobody. Jealousy afflicts many people in the West. The more civilized people are, the

more they appear to suffer from jealousy. It is extremely damaging for our peace of mind.

“Do not be temperamental.”

Do not indulge in feelings of uncontrollable pleasure or displeasure. Oversensitivity and emotional extremes divert our attention from practice and disturb our mind. The objective of meditation is to bring the mind into a steady and moderate state where it can rest.

“Do not expect thanks or applause.”

No one is going to praise or admire us for our dharma training. There are no witnesses or onlookers to appreciate or approve of what we have done. In ordinary life, our good deeds and compassion go unnoticed and unacclaimed. If we expect any recognition or tribute, we will be disappointed. We simply make quiet, sustained progress towards the goal of liberation.

CONCLUDING VERSES

ATISHA received teachings from many different gurus. When the names of these teachers were mentioned, he held his hands in prayer. When he remembered Serlingpa, who had taught him Lojong, he folded his hands and wept tears. These verses express his deep gratitude:

This quintessential elixir of instruction,
Which changes the five kinds of degeneration
Into the way of awakening,
Is a transmission from Serlingpa.

The awakening of the karmic energy
of previous training
Aroused intense interest in me.
Therefore, I ignored suffering and criticism
And sought instruction for subduing ego-clinging.
Now, when I die, I will regret nothing.

الْوَادِي

THE SLOGANS

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THE FIRST POINT

First, train in the preliminaries.

THE SECOND POINT

Regard all phenomena as a dream.

Examine the unborn nature of mind.

*Self-liberate even the antidote and free yourself
from the findings of the meditation.*

Rest in the nature of alaya.

In postmeditation, view everything as illusion.

*Train in taking and sending. These two should ride the
breath.*

Three objects, three poisons, three roots.

*Cultivate a compassionate attitude by enlisting
the slogans.*

Begin the sequence with yourself.

THE THIRD POINT

Turn all mishaps into the path to enlightenment.

Drive all blame into one.

Be grateful to everyone.

*See confusion as the four kayas. The protection
of emptiness is unsurpassable.*

Four applications are the best of methods.

*To bring the unexpected obstacles to the path,
prepare by training now.*

THE FOURTH POINT

Train in the five forces.

*The instructions for how to die properly are
the five forces.*

THE FIFTH POINT

All dharmas agree at one point.

Rely upon the better of two witnesses.

Always be sustained by cheerfulness.

*You are well trained if you can practice even
when distracted.*

THE SIXTH POINT

Practice the three basic principles.

Change your attitude but remain natural.

Do not talk about weak points.

Do not ponder others' faults.

Work on your greatest defilement first.

Give up hoping for results.

Refrain from poisonous food.

Do not be predictable.

Forsake ridicule and cutting remarks.

Do not wait in ambush.

Do not strike at the sore point.

Do not transfer the ox's load to the cow.

Do not try to be the fastest.

Do not act with twisted motives.

Do not make gods into demons.

*Do not seek another's pain as the instrument
of your happiness.*

THE SEVENTH POINT

*All activities should be done with the intention
of helping others.*

Correct all wrongs with one intention.

Two activities, at the beginning and at the end.

Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.

*Observe these two even at the risk of the loss
of your life.*

Train in the three difficulties.

Take up the three essential factors.

Do not allow three things to weaken.

Keep the three inseparable.

*Train in all areas, without partiality. Do this perva-
sively.*

Meditate on subjects which provoke you.

Do not be swayed by external circumstances.

Practice the important points now.

Do not misapprehend.

Be firm. Train wholeheartedly.

Free yourself by examining and investigating.

Do not indulge in self-pity.

Do not be jealous or irritable.

Do not be temperamental.

Do not expect thanks or applause.